



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES



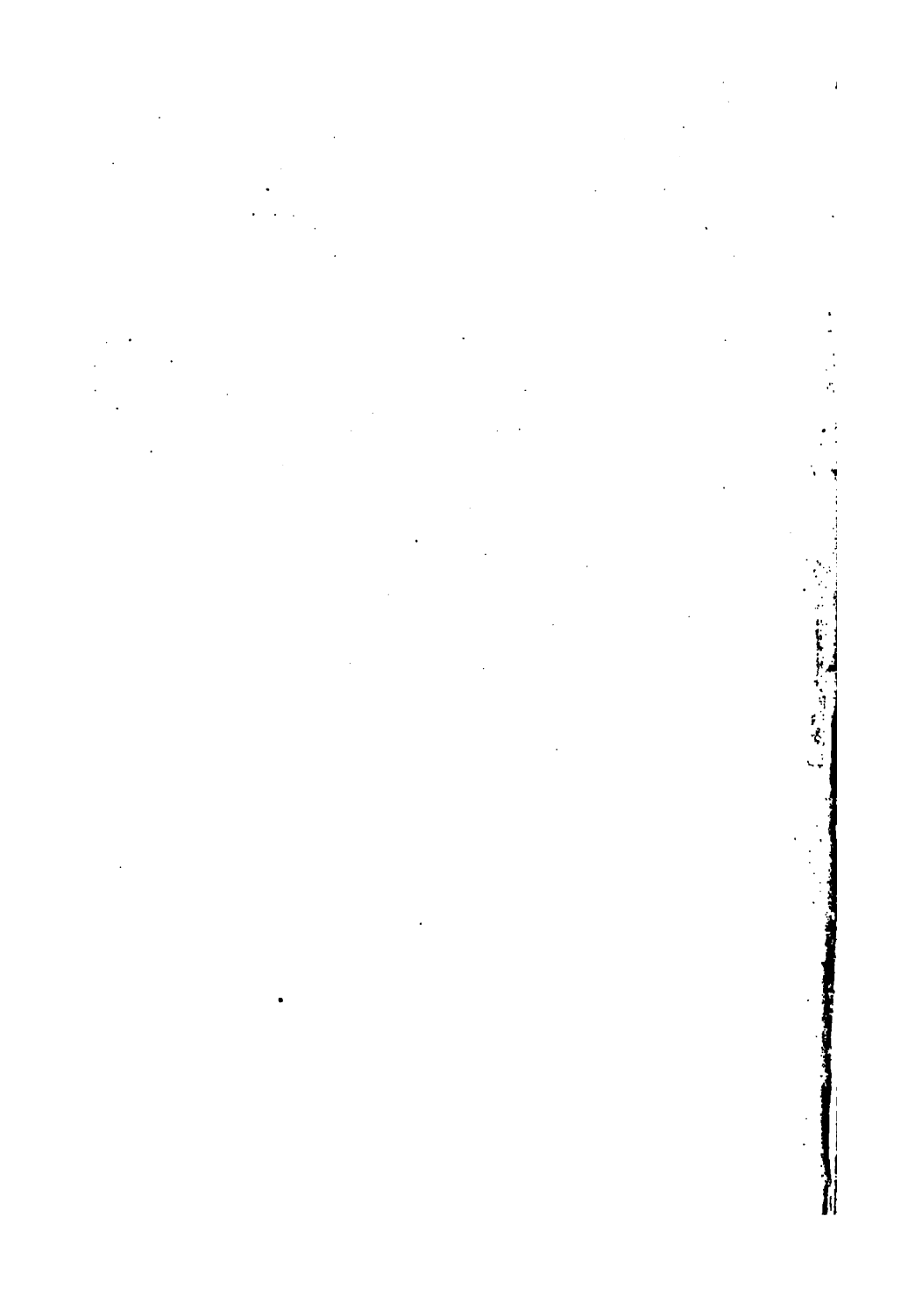
3 3433 07480673 2

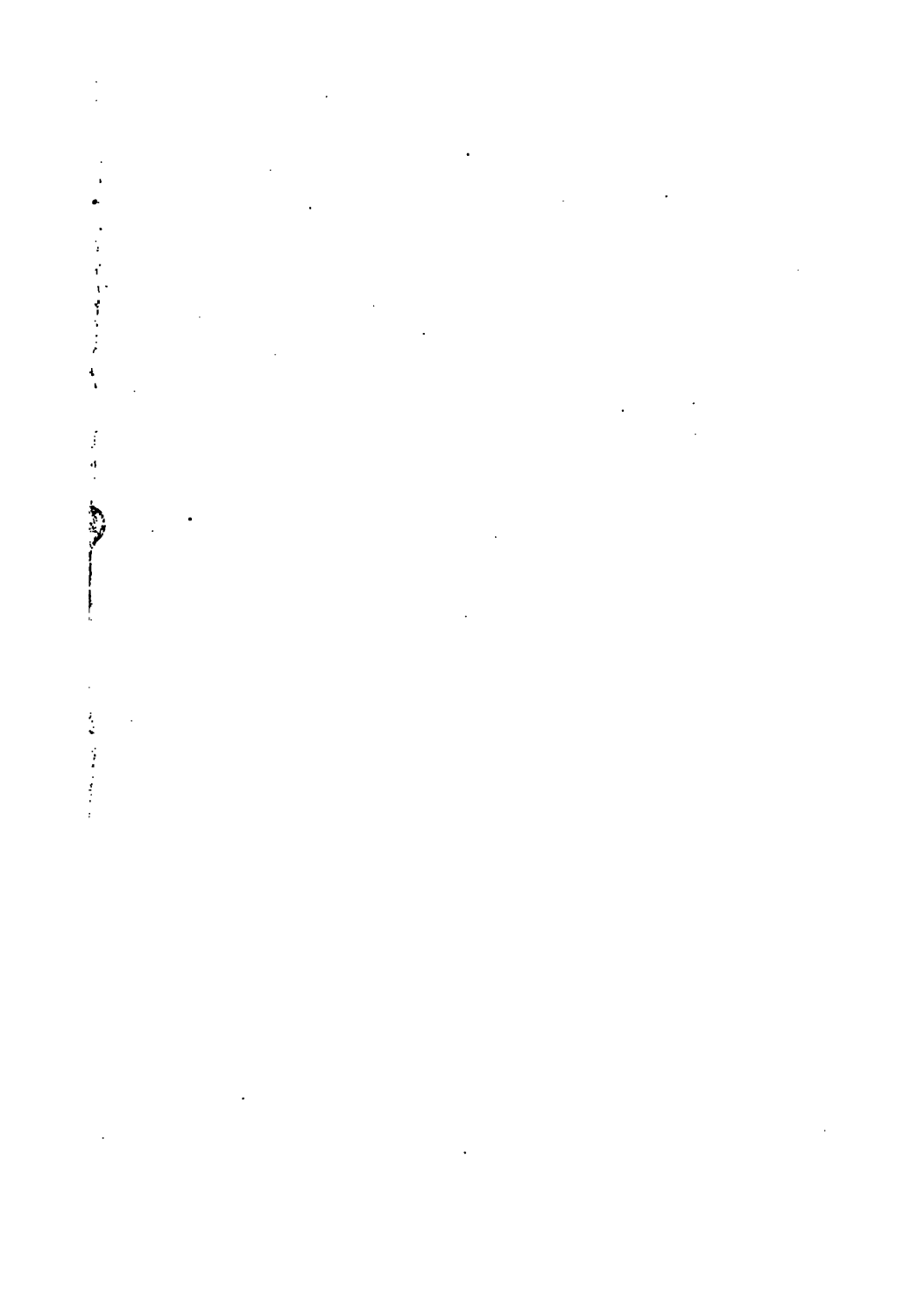
HENDERSON

ROSE E. YOUNG

1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10. 11. 12. 13. 14. 15. 16. 17. 18. 19. 20. 21. 22. 23. 24. 25. 26. 27. 28. 29. 30. 31. 32. 33. 34. 35. 36. 37. 38. 39. 40. 41. 42. 43. 44. 45. 46. 47. 48. 49. 50. 51. 52. 53. 54. 55. 56. 57. 58. 59. 60. 61. 62. 63. 64. 65. 66. 67. 68. 69. 70. 71. 72. 73. 74. 75. 76. 77. 78. 79. 80. 81. 82. 83. 84. 85. 86. 87. 88. 89. 90. 91. 92. 93. 94. 95. 96. 97. 98. 99. 100. 101. 102. 103. 104. 105. 106. 107. 108. 109. 110. 111. 112. 113. 114. 115. 116. 117. 118. 119. 120. 121. 122. 123. 124. 125. 126. 127. 128. 129. 130. 131. 132. 133. 134. 135. 136. 137. 138. 139. 140. 141. 142. 143. 144. 145. 146. 147. 148. 149. 150. 151. 152. 153. 154. 155. 156. 157. 158. 159. 160. 161. 162. 163. 164. 165. 166. 167. 168. 169. 170. 171. 172. 173. 174. 175. 176. 177. 178. 179. 180. 181. 182. 183. 184. 185. 186. 187. 188. 189. 190. 191. 192. 193. 194. 195. 196. 197. 198. 199. 200. 201. 202. 203. 204. 205. 206. 207. 208. 209. 210. 211. 212. 213. 214. 215. 216. 217. 218. 219. 220. 221. 222. 223. 224. 225. 226. 227. 228. 229. 230. 231. 232. 233. 234. 235. 236. 237. 238. 239. 240. 241. 242. 243. 244. 245. 246. 247. 248. 249. 250. 251. 252. 253. 254. 255. 256. 257. 258. 259. 260. 261. 262. 263. 264. 265. 266. 267. 268. 269. 270. 271. 272. 273. 274. 275. 276. 277. 278. 279. 280. 281. 282. 283. 284. 285. 286. 287. 288. 289. 290. 291. 292. 293. 294. 295. 296. 297. 298. 299. 300. 301. 302. 303. 304. 305. 306. 307. 308. 309. 310. 311. 312. 313. 314. 315. 316. 317. 318. 319. 320. 321. 322. 323. 324. 325. 326. 327. 328. 329. 330. 331. 332. 333. 334. 335. 336. 337. 338. 339. 340. 341. 342. 343. 344. 345. 346. 347. 348. 349. 350. 351. 352. 353. 354. 355. 356. 357. 358. 359. 360. 361. 362. 363. 364. 365. 366. 367. 368. 369. 370. 371. 372. 373. 374. 375. 376. 377. 378. 379. 380. 381. 382. 383. 384. 385. 386. 387. 388. 389. 390. 391. 392. 393. 394. 395. 396. 397. 398. 399. 400. 401. 402. 403. 404. 405. 406. 407. 408. 409. 410. 411. 412. 413. 414. 415. 416. 417. 418. 419. 420. 421. 422. 423. 424. 425. 426. 427. 428. 429. 430. 431. 432. 433. 434. 435. 436. 437. 438. 439. 440. 441. 442. 443. 444. 445. 446. 447. 448. 449. 450. 451. 452. 453. 454. 455. 456. 457. 458. 459. 460. 461. 462. 463. 464. 465. 466. 467. 468. 469. 470. 471. 472. 473. 474. 475. 476. 477. 478. 479. 480. 481. 482. 483. 484. 485. 486. 487. 488. 489. 490. 491. 492. 493. 494. 495. 496. 497. 498. 499. 500. 501. 502. 503. 504. 505. 506. 507. 508. 509. 510. 511. 512. 513. 514. 515. 516. 517. 518. 519. 520. 521. 522. 523. 524. 525. 526. 527. 528. 529. 530. 531. 532. 533. 534. 535. 536. 537. 538. 539. 540. 541. 542. 543. 544. 545. 546. 547. 548. 549. 550. 551. 552. 553. 554. 555. 556. 557. 558. 559. 560. 561. 562. 563. 564. 565. 566. 567. 568. 569. 570. 571. 572. 573. 574. 575. 576. 577. 578. 579. 580. 581. 582. 583. 584. 585. 586. 587. 588. 589. 590. 591. 592. 593. 594. 595. 596. 597. 598. 599. 600. 601. 602. 603. 604. 605. 606. 607. 608. 609. 610. 611. 612. 613. 614. 615. 616. 617. 618. 619. 620. 621. 622. 623. 624. 625. 626. 627. 628. 629. 630. 631. 632. 633. 634. 635. 636. 637. 638. 639. 640. 641. 642. 643. 644. 645. 646. 647. 648. 649. 650. 651. 652. 653. 654. 655. 656. 657. 658. 659. 660. 661. 662. 663. 664. 665. 666. 667. 668. 669. 670. 671. 672. 673. 674. 675. 676. 677. 678. 679. 680. 681. 682. 683. 684. 685. 686. 687. 688. 689. 690. 691. 692. 693. 694. 695. 696. 697. 698. 699. 700. 701. 702. 703. 704. 705. 706. 707. 708. 709. 710. 711. 712. 713. 714. 715. 716. 717. 718. 719. 720. 721. 722. 723. 724. 725. 726. 727. 728. 729. 730. 731. 732. 733. 734. 735. 736. 737. 738. 739. 740. 741. 742. 743. 744. 745. 746. 747. 748. 749. 750. 751. 752. 753. 754. 755. 756. 757. 758. 759. 760. 761. 762. 763. 764. 765. 766. 767. 768. 769. 770. 771. 772. 773. 774. 775. 776. 777. 778. 779. 780. 781. 782. 783. 784. 785. 786. 787. 788. 789. 790. 791. 792. 793. 794. 795. 796. 797. 798. 799. 800. 801. 802. 803. 804. 805. 806. 807. 808. 809. 810. 811. 812. 813. 814. 815. 816. 817. 818. 819. 820. 821. 822. 823. 824. 825. 826. 827. 828. 829. 830. 831. 832. 833. 834. 835. 836. 837. 838. 839. 840.

1000
Mans





HENDERSON

HENDERSON

By Rose E. Young

Author of "Sally of Missouri"



BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN AND COMPANY
The Riverside Press, Cambridge

1904

MRS

996364A

COPYRIGHT 1904 BY ROSE E. YOUNG

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Published February 1904

Dedicated to
E. S. YOUNG AND J. W. YOUNG

WOR 19 FEB 56



CONTENTS

| | PAGE |
|----------------------------------|------|
| I. THE DIFFICULT MINUTE | 1 |
| II. THE LIFE ON THE TABLE . . . | 43 |
| III. THE ROSE-RED GLOW | 78 |
| IV. THE TRAIL OF THE TANGLER . . | 118 |
| V. THE WAY OF THE STRONG . . . | 152 |
| VI. THE BEGINNING | 179 |



HENDERSON

I

THE DIFFICULT MINUTE

FROM the depot at Penangton, Morning County, Missouri, to the one line of street-cars it is ten miles. Henderson figured that out for himself, as he stumbled irritably over the rough road, across the bridge, up the plank walk, to the car. It was an October evening, and the day was trailing off in a gray, shining halation that was neither mist nor fog, but dancing haze. Henderson saw far-away houses brooded over by gray wings; he saw rickety wheels of gray spiked by the small gleam of the street-lamps; and he saw occasional people work up out of, and twist back into, the farther distance in gray spirals. The whole town and the hills beyond it were

HENDERSON

one wavering, lightening, darkening scheme of gray, except where, far to the west, a stretch of red lay along the sky.

As he came on toward the car, Henderson had a half-dashed, half-defiant look in his eyes. "You're a pretty cuss!" he mumbled once or twice. "Better have stayed in Chicago in the first place. Better have stayed in Dixburn in the last place. Penangton!" He looked about him disgustedly. To the west he could distinguish the outline of a tall building, shadowy and uncertain in the gloom; he picked out the white letters across its sides: "P-e-n-r-y-n M-i-l-l-s." He looked to the east, and saw a straggling line of sheds. He read the letters on their sides easily enough, because his eyes had become accustomed to the first part of the combination: "Penryn C-o-a-l—Penryn Coal P-o-c—Penryn Coal Pockets." He stopped halfway up the plank walk, dropped his heavy traveling-case, and worked the fingers of his aching hand. His eyes, sweeping south-

THE DIFFICULT MINUTE

ward, were caught by a trim brick building beyond the depot. It had white letters across its front. "The first word is Penryn," said Henderson, at a guess. "No, the first word is T-h-o-r-l-e-y. Thorley-P-e-n-r — Uh-unh! I knew Penryn would be along. Now what's the rest? Thorley-Penryn S-e-r-o-t-h-e-r — Oh, go to the dickens!" he finished impotently. "I don't care what you are." Still farther south he descried the headstones of a cemetery. "Good! One can at least die in Penangton. I'll bet the tallest shaft is named Penryn." The night's blacker shadow leaped up out of the earth then, and the haze became thick gloom. The last red flare was gone from the west. Two men came up the plank walk toward Henderson.

"Coolish night," he heard one saying, as they clacked off northward.

"Brrrt! It is a coolish night," said Henderson to himself. He turned to pick up his valise, but for some reason his hands went together first, and he clinched them tightly.

HENDERSON

"A coolish night," he heard himself repeating, with a wandering intonation. Then he shook himself threateningly. "Oh, I'll try again. Of course I'll try," he said; but he said it like a man who is trying to anæsthetize his soul; and when he got into the car, the look in his eyes was more distinctively dashed than defiant.

"Is there a driver?" he by and by asked wistfully of the one other occupant of the car.

"Yes, there's a driver," — the other occupant looked out of the window at a frame house which stood just where the plank walk ended and the brick pavement and the car track began, — "but there's also a saloon."

Henderson bit his lower lip in a confidential enjoyment of the quality of that voice. There was a note in it of standing things good-naturedly when they couldn't be helped.

"I wonder if there's no way of breaking the connection?" he said, getting back to

THE DIFFICULT MINUTE

the driver and the saloon with a jerk. He went to the car door and hallooed at the frame house. A man came to the door.

"Dave ain't quite ready yet," called the man, thickly but genially. "Jes wait a minute till he wets his whis'le, will you?"

It seemed the thing to do under the circumstances. The air had the crispness of early autumn, and Henderson saw that the woman in the car felt it; so he shut the door and came patiently back to his seat.

"It's just one of Penangton's ways," she explained, with a funny little lift of her brows.

Henderson took his lower lip into confidence again and poised himself—in mid-air, as it were—on the sound of that voice. It had so many kinds of suggestion in it. She had said only two sentences to him, but the first had made him aware that whatever was worth laughing at in the world she was ready to laugh at, and the next had made him aware that she had run the gamut of Penang-

HENDERSON

ton from end to end. After the atony of the past few weeks he was glad of his rising interest in that voice, in anything. His soul, he knew, was somewhere near in the same tense attitude his body had assumed out on the plank walk, but he had a desire to tell his soul to shut up, to come along, to make the best of it.

"It's quite a town, Penangton?"

"The lamp is sputtering," said the woman, in reply. "Could n't you turn the wick higher? Oh, goodness, it's going out! Why, there's no oil in it."

They both got up hurriedly, but the lamp was too far gone for rescue. It began to smoke dismally.

"I'll go get the driver," said Henderson. "Just wait here a minute." He jumped off the car and ran up the steps to the saloon. Presently he came back, shaking his head. "The driver's drunk for fair," he said. "Everybody in there's drunk. What'll we do?"

THE DIFFICULT MINUTE

"Could n't you drive?" she asked merrily.

He looked down the silent street and his eyes lit up a little. "I'll drive you home, if you'll let me," he said, with decision. "I can just do it." He ran through to the front of the car, and unwound the reins from the brake. The mules stirred slowly and sorrowfully. "Shall I?" asked Henderson. The woman began to laugh. "Do you live on the car-line?" went on Henderson gleefully. He laughed, too. It seemed good to be pulling his soul along out of its tragics into something humorous and commonplace. "Come up!" He shook the reins out over the mules. "It's my idea to drive until I stop to let you out, then drive on a little farther, and leave the car standing on the track, while I cut for an hotel. Do you think it will work? — The mules seem to like to stand." His voice broke up into little chuckles, like a schoolboy's.

The woman came out on the front platform to him. She could hardly talk for laughing.

HENDERSON

"It will work," she said, "unless somebody else gets on the car."

Henderson's face wrinkled a little, but he shot the leather quirt out over the mules briskly. "Nobody will get on," he said. "I'll never be able to stop this team." He felt so exhilarated that it was like pain. The car began to make a great banging noise that just suited him. The way the sparks flew from the hoofs of the mules just suited him. The way that woman leaned back against the car door and laughed just suited him. It was all so entirely on the outside. There was nothing introspective about it. He looked back at her gayly. "I hope you live at the other end of the line?" he queried.

"About halfway."

"I hope it's a long line."

"About two miles, not counting the roughness."

"Don't count the roughness. Nothing counts."

THE DIFFICULT MINUTE

"That's it, — nothing counts. Is n't this a lark?"

Henderson nodded brightly. "Will it be dark like this all the way?" he asked; and when she said yes, he began to sing the first bars of a gay little air under his breath; the woman sang too, both of them holding their voices down cautiously.

"Don't you ever finish things?" she complained finally, after trying in vain to adapt her voice to Henderson's many-tuned melody.

"No," said Henderson. "No; I don't like the finish — of anything." He moved back to where she was, and leaned against the car frame, with the reins dangling carelessly. "The beginning is always so much more interesting."

She rocked her head on the door-jamb at her back. "Mmh! I don't know."

"Oh, yes!" cried Henderson. "In the beginning you have the beginning and all you can imagine about the end."

HENDERSON

"But in the end you have the end and all you can remember about the beginning."

"Remember!" It was a bad word for Henderson. Something like a shiver passed over him. "I'll back imagination, anticipation, against memory, seven days in the week, won't you?"

"Hold in your mule steeds here," said the woman. "Steady for the corner."

They swung around the corner, and started on a gentle down grade between two rows of splendid trees. "Say," said Henderson, following her lead like a happy child, and shunting the conversation off on a side track again, "say, are n't you cold?"

"No, indeed. Is n't this air fine? That's one good thing we have in Penangton."

"What other good things do you have in Penangton?"

"Oh, mills and coal-mines and an academy. Then there's the county,"—she gave a wide sweep of her arm which seemed to skip

THE DIFFICULT MINUTE

over the town and encircle something outside it, — “wheat !”

“Many doctors here ?”

She looked back into the car at the small case which sat beside his large one. “Oh ! I see. Yes, there are a great many doctors.”

“What school ?”

“Two who get their bills paid eventually, two who forget to send out bills, and one rascal.”

Henderson propped one foot on the splash-board of the car. “The last class seems to invite as being least crowded,” he commented gravely.

“Well, I don’t know ; if it comes to that, they are all more or less rascals, — at least they don’t believe in themselves. That’s a pretty bad sort of rascality, you know. Are you coming here to live ?” she asked suddenly, turning her face toward him.

“Like as not.”

“Well, if you do, there’s one thing in

HENDERSON

Penangton you want to look out for. There's one thing that *is n't* a good thing. It's Penrynism."

"What's Penrynism?"

"It's the money disease. Some doctors get it. The rascal here has it."

Henderson dropped his head, and whacked at his shoes with the butt of his quirt. "I expect I'll get it, then. I feel particularly susceptible to infection of that kind just at this writing." Immediately he was as sombre as he had been out there on the plank walk; his merriment had been a thin cloak, after all, and it had worn through.

"Slow up now," said the woman next. "I'm almost home. Just around this last corner."

He drew his breath in sharply, and made the mules take the corner very slowly. He made them go slower yet when he found that he was on a street where the trees were so big and so close together, and the street-lamps were so little and so far apart, that it

THE DIFFICULT MINUTE

was as black as Egypt, and as mysteriously pleasant.

"Stop. I'm home."

"Now you see," said Henderson ruefully, "why I hate the end of things." He stepped down to help her from the car.

"Remember the beginning. — Oh, you are going to have to learn to stand remembering," she insisted, laughing lightly. "Here, this is my gate."

He ran ahead and opened it for her, and as she passed through he lifted his hat high and made her a sweeping bow. "I'd rather hope it is n't the end," he said.

She only laughed again, and stood looking at him for a short moment. "I think it is. But it was a nice ride. I shan't forget it. Good-night." She called back another cheerful good-night, as she went up the walk, while Henderson, at the gate, watched her, with a lonely look on his face. Ahead of her he traced out a big frowning house-front, across the lower part of which ran a light

HENDERSON

veranda, like a misplaced smile. When the door had opened to her, she paused for a moment in the light from the hall, with her face turned his way; then the door shut quietly. Henderson rubbed his hand softly over the brass head of the low gate-post, until presently his eyes traveled to it. "P-e-n-r-y-n," he spelled unseeingly. When he did begin to see it, he said flat-footedly, "Well, I'm damned!" and turned back to his mules.

They were gone. As far down the street as he could see, there was no sign of them. "Now, how the mischief am I to find my way?" mused Henderson, without concern. "Follow the track," suggested common sense. "Follow, follow!" supplemented romance fancifully; "a track must lead from the beginning to the ending. So light her up, Fate, kind lady; we follow." With that Henderson looked at the Penryn house purposefully.

He was sure the car-track would pass an hotel somewhere, and he had turned but

THE DIFFICULT MINUTE

another corner when he came upon one, with the car and the sad mules standing before it. A crowd of mild-looking men were around the car.

"But how you going to account for the satchels?" one man was asking, with the hope of excitement vibrating blithely in his voice.

Henderson got into the crowd at this juncture. "I'll account for the satchels," he volunteered. "You'll find my name on them, Henderson. I left them in the car while I went into the saloon for the driver. — The mules ambled off while I was out of the car." It was a long hiatus, but Henderson saw that there was no need of bridging it over; that the men around him were used to the driver, the saloon, and the mules.

Once in the hotel, he went directly to his room, took off his top-coat, and sat down in front of a comfortably glowing grate. "Very beautiful," he said, straight at the red coals. For a few minutes longer a half-blunted

HENDERSON

interest remained in his face ; then his hands spread out weakly on the arms of the chair and he dropped his chin as though he were going down in his clothes with the shame-faced resolution never to come up again.

Slowly and reluctantly his mind went back over his most recent past, the Illinois days. First of all came the medical college in Chicago ; and clearest of all was the vision of Alden, the dean, on the rostrum before the class, his burning eyes throwing off some kind of illumination, conviction radiating from every inch of his long, swaying body. And loudest of all rang the recollection of Alden's voice, high and quivering in its advocacy of the Hahnemannian creed, the beauty of the "law," the totality of the symptoms, the central modality ; or fiercely earnest in its denunciation of routinism, specifics, prescribing in the lump. Ah, Alden had believed. That had been the intrinsic beauty of sitting under him. Henderson's perception had always been of the keenest, and Henderson, of all

THE DIFFICULT MINUTE

the men and women who had listened to Alden, and learned of him, in the first four years of the college's struggle for existence, had been the one to carry away with him the deepest impress of Alden's spirit. He, of them all, had gone out from the college doors with the feeling most strong upon him that he had had a glorious bath in some deep, clean current of ethics. He had never been able to account to himself for Alden's influence upon him. Before he went up to college he had been commonplace enough, a quick, shrewd fellow, with a good business head, acute sympathies, and one strong inclination in the world, — the inclination to study medicine; but when he left Alden he was like a finely charged wire, across which hummed and sang concepts of his profession as the "noble profession," the scientific possibilities of the "noble profession," life as an opportunity for the "noble profession," — all that went to make Alden's life like a benediction.

HENDERSON

And what happened? What always happens to the young physician who has n't money enough to wait three years for patients, and abide by the Code while waiting? He had first "located" in Chicago, in a South Side boarding-house; a little later he had located in a town in central Illinois; and after that he had variously located all over the state, until he found himself at Dixburn, in southern Illinois. Henderson's memory could linger in any one of the half dozen towns that had preceded Dixburn, and could find in each something halfway pleasant or halfway worth while; but Dixburn had been hell from start to finish. He had to admit that his acute sufferings in Dixburn had had no better or bigger excuse than that his clothes had begun there to show signs of irreparable wear, and he had had no money for new ones. Something psychical worked itself out in him during the second month that he loafed and suffered around that sun-baked Illinois town. It might have been change,

THE DIFFICULT MINUTE

or it might have been development, or it might have been reversion. "I have got down to my clothes," was the way he passed judgment upon himself; and, as he had the time, he began to outline, with some contemptuous amusement, the sort of man he would have been if it had happened that he had never been influenced by Alden. When he had put himself to himself as "ordinary," he went under a wet blanket of conviction that he must get at life on a different plane; that he had been keyed up too high in the beginning. A little later on in that last month, there had come a day when one of his shoes cracked straight across the top; and in the black, helpless cursing that Henderson stuffed into the crack he checked off self-potentialities never before suspected. As he sat and glared at the shoe, he told himself unqualifiedly that he was done with trying to meet the conditions of life in the Alden way; that he was ready to do anything now for money, money! and

HENDERSON

that Fate would better not tempt him. His face assumed too sharp an expression; it became the face of a man in danger of overreaching himself, in his greediness for gain. He felt sure that, if opportunity had come his way, he would have done things that much worse men than he never do. The whiteness and the fineness of Alden's influence lifted from him entirely, and circled off above him with a cool backward fanning.

Then a medical magazine offered a prize of one hundred and fifty dollars for the best essay on The Physician as Friend, and Henderson, with rebellion and blasphemy and battered-down belief in his heart, wrote ethically, and got the one hundred and fifty dollars. Inevitably, the next thing he did was to buy some shoes. That the ethical should have stretched out a hand to him with a purse in it just at this moment half frightened him. He walked about Dixburn in his new shoes for another month in crushed

THE DIFFICULT MINUTE

incompetency, and when he crossed over to Penangton he was still effectually flattened out. The truth was, he told himself in final review, as he sat there with his face tucked away from the comfort in the grate, — the truth was that he had primed himself for wickedness in Dixburn, had hung around and waited for temptation, and temptation had not come. Instead of temptation had come a chance of the right sort. "But if the wrong sort of chance had come," Henderson pointed out to his soul, with that pitilessly keen insight that was his, — "if the wrong sort had come, and I had profited by it more than by the one hundred and fifty, I wonder, O my Soul, if you would be whining around now like an abused house-cat?"

He tumbled into bed a few minutes later, glad to find that he was sleepy. Before he was done felicitating himself upon that fact he sat up, staringly awake. "If I don't win out here," he said, as though he had dragged up a large conclusion from the edge of the

HENDERSON

land of dreams, — “if I don’t win out here, I’ll never win out. It’s now or never, and I don’t think I’ll ever forget how she looked there in that doorway.” The dying gleam in the grate shot up and broke into small gaseous bubbles as he lay back on his pillow.

When he had dressed and breakfasted, the next morning, and had made his way to the street, he felt immeasurably better. He sat down in one of the loafing-chairs outside the hotel door, and smoked, with two clearly defined notions in his head: one was to finish his cigar, and the other was to beat back along that car-track to the house whose door had opened and shut in front of him the night before. Every time he thought of the woman who had stood framed in that door, he found his determination to stay in Penangton strengthening. He was very near the end of his cigar, and very near the beginning of a dream, when a man stopped in front of him.

THE DIFFICULT MINUTE

"Scrape my shins if 't ain't!" said the man, holding out his hand. The big, assertive voice pushed through Henderson's dream like a steam-roller, and bowled him back, willy-nilly, to the medical college, Alden, and the Chicago days.

"Oh, you, Thorley? How d'you do?" Henderson's greeting was slow, but it had the amiability that curls off the end of a good cigar, and he got up and shook hands with the man, whom he could place as one of the fellows of the '90 class. He had not seen Thorley since the finish in April, two years and more before, and he hardly recognized him because of the bushy side-whiskers on his face. Still, when he came to think of it, it was inevitable that Thorley should have sprung those whiskers. One never saw a man with his kind of face who did n't sooner or later come to side-whiskers, and stop there permanently. All that Henderson immediately recalled about him was that he was the one chap at college who did n't have

HENDERSON

to get "used" to the dissecting-room. Thorley had n't sickened or blinked from the first. And that odor of blood, still warm enough to run, which sorely tried every freshman's stomach in the operating-rooms, had n't bothered Thorley in the least. He had n't even noticed it, until a boy in front of him reeled, and had to be swung out by his shoulders and heels.

"Live here?" asked Henderson.

"Yes. How are you making it?" Thorley laughed a good-natured, rollicking laugh as soon as Henderson opened his mouth to reply. "Need n't to tell me. About eighteen of the twenty in the '90 class have told me already. I'm making it," he rounded off, with a dogged down jerk of his head.

"How?"

"Whiskey cure."

"Oh, Lord!"

"*And* morphine," went on Thorley, untouched.

"What's your—your cure?" Henderson

THE DIFFICULT MINUTE

smiled down at Thorley from the heights of the Code, as he nicked the ash from his cigar.

"Something new. It's a serotherapy wrinkle."

Henderson's smile became a deep-lunged laugh, and Thorley's round eyes twinkled.

"Hair of the dog for the bite," Thorley insisted. "Only mine's cows. It's simple." His eyes fairly danced. "Inoculate a cow with alcohol; then draw off the serum from the cow's blood, and use as an antidote for inebriety. You'd be surprised at the way it works, Henderson."

For a moment Henderson made no reply; a direct line of comparison had projected itself from the face of Thorley, standing there with his fat neck spilling over his collar, to the face of Alden, all aglow with splendid dignity. "You've got a long way from Alden," he demurred at last.

"Oh, Alden hell!" said Thorley, with a short laugh which stayed good-natured. "Alden's wife has enough money for him to

HENDERSON

live on. Mine has n't. That's the difference between me and Alden." He rocked back on his heels easily. "Going to be here long?" he asked.

"Maybe."

"I tell you what you do," suggested Thorley quickly, and with some emphasis. "Come up and see my sanitarium. And say, one of these days I'll take you out to the depot and show you the Thorley-Penryn Serotherapy Stables, where we draw off anti-alcoholic serum for alcoholism."

"Quack, quack, quack!" laughed Henderson; and Thorley went off with his own mouth puckered.

After Thorley had left him, Henderson started up the street toward the Penryn house. He had no trouble in finding it; but when he got within a block of it he had trouble in accounting for its being there, — in Penangton. It was so much of a castle that while it had ten times more ground than the Chicago castles, it still did n't have half

THE DIFFICULT MINUTE

ground enough. The effect was not good, "though it would be if there were two miles of park," thought Henderson. "Now, how did she ever make a mistake of that kind? Must have been built before she grew up and took hold of things." He walked on a little farther, and examined the house more carefully. "It *was* built before she grew up and took hold of things," he said finally, his eyes, agile as squirrels, running up and down the weather marks of the house. He felt immediately relieved. It somehow seemed to him very important, just then, that that woman should not fail him anywhere, should come quite up to what he expected of her. Suddenly he decided not to go any nearer the house. It occurred to him that if she should see him loitering about, their "beginning" might be cheapened: He made a detour around the house, and came back to the main street a block above it, and continued his walk.

He took that walk and made that detour

HENDERSON

every day for a week; and although he never got a glimpse of her, he refrained from making any inquiries about her at the hotel, from the same fear of cheapening their beginning. During that week, however, he learned incidentally that the various signs which had glared him out of countenance, the night of his arrival, did not begin to cover all of the Penryn consequence to Penangton. Every enterprise in the town or around it was a Penryn enterprise, and the town itself was thickly coated with an adulation of Penryn which was yet not thick enough to hide its deep dislike for him.

It was on Tuesday of Henderson's second week of the old business of waiting for business that Thorley came into the hotel and asked for him. Thorley had that concentrated look that most people wear when they are acting under a rigid determination to bring up something casually before they have done with you.

"Suppose you come up and take a look at

THE DIFFICULT MINUTE

my sanitarium to-day," said he, early in the conversation. "Suppose you come along now. Would n't you care to? I'd like to show you over."

They went down the street together, and Henderson knew that Thorley was telling some hard-luck story of his own about early struggles; but as that same kind of story was already marked across Henderson's memory with a great puckered cicatrix that pinched every nerve in him, he made a point of not listening, until Thorley said, "There she is," and turned his fat hand on his wrist by way of indicating the sanitarium. It was a two-story main building of brick, with frame annexes that cluttered it up like an oversupply of white wings. The main building was well out toward the street, and had on its front windows, "Serotherapy Cure for Alcoholism. If I Don't Cure You, You Don't Pay Me." The subtle, half-sweet, half-cutting odor of some never before smelled drug combination assailed Hender-

HENDERSON

son as soon as he was inside. He sniffed at it curiously, as Thorley led the way into a front room, which seemed to be an office because of the desk and safe in it, and a laboratory because of the long vial-cabinet against one wall. The other walls were hung with what looked like framed certificates, at first glance, but, on closer inspection, proved to be engrossed letters, all beginning, "My dear Dr. Thorley," and all ending, "Very gratefully yours."

"What's that I smell, Thorley?" asked Henderson, still sniffing.

"That? Oh, that's my secret."

"You ought to keep your secret better bottled, then," retorted Henderson. "It smells to heaven."

"Well, now," said Thorley, sitting down at the desk, "I was just thinking of unbot-tling it, in a way. Look here, Henderson, what's lacking about you that you useter have? Tussle been too devilish hard for you? Sit down over there, — sit down. You

THE DIFFICULT MINUTE

want to try your hand at something 'tain't so hard? Something that 'll pay?"

"Depends on the something," smiled Henderson, as he took the chair pointed out to him.

"Oh no, it don't," Thorley answered emphatically. "No, it don't. You can just bet your life on that, — as long as you have n't a wife with the money. Let's make a long story short, Henderson. What I want to tell you is this: I'm making a go of this show. I guess you ain't been here long enough to know all it means to be hitched to the name of Penryn with a hyphen. It's meaning so much that I can hardly keep track of it. I gotta have a partner, — a parlor partner, Henderson. Trouble with me is, I'm getting a lot of people in here that I can't han'le. I'm plain to say they are up the scale from me a ways. I haveter keep my mouth shut just for fear of not saying the right thing. They come from St. Louis and Kansas City and round about, and I don't go with 'em.

HENDERSON

'Specially I don't go with the women. When you add morphine jim-jams to women's natural fits you've got too much for me, Henderson. They want you to be sympathetic, and they're afraid you'll be fresh. They keep *me* twirling. The fact is, I gotta have some help."

"Count me out, Thorley."

"Well, now, I don't see why. You need n't think I ain't straight. It's all legitimate. There are hundreds of places, or similar, in this state and in every state in the Union."

Thorley glanced up at Henderson, and then continued, a little sheepishly: "They do some good. My medicine is a sort of antidote, don't care what you say."

"I guess your medicine is n't the serum, then. I guess you fall back on the muriate or the bichloride a little."

"Keep on guessing," laughed Thorley. "Whatever it is, it helps my patients to stop, if they wanta stop; it helps 'em get 'em-

THE DIFFICULT MINUTE

selves back. Say, Henderson, if you want the truth, I got just one qualm of conscience about this business. The patients are such a damn bad lot in general, I feel some guilty about helping 'em to get 'emselves back. There's nothing in 'em worth saving. When you fish 'em up, and dry 'em out, and put 'em on their feet, you feel like you 'd played a joke on 'em."

"Thorley, what the dickens did you ever pick' out a missionary business for?" Henderson got up, frowning. "You don't care a continental about giving people a chance, yet —"

"Blue blazes, man," cried Thorley, "it's my own chance I'm concerned about, — not theirs! See here, Henderson. I suppose if I were a damn fool, who went about this thing with his face shining and his lips twitching, like Alden, you 'd think the thing was all right, and that I was all right. I know the enthusiasm dodge; but I got two eyes, let me tell you, and I'm none the

HENDERSON

worse man for seeing on both sides and straight to the bottom."

"You are the worse man, though, Thorley, for never seeing straight to the top. Wall your eyes up a little once in a way, and you might get still another view."

When Henderson parted from Thorley, that day, he went home directly past the Penryn house. He felt justified in it; and though he did not see Miss Penryn about the place, a fine and unsullied glow lasted him all the way to the hotel.

After that, sustained by the sense of justification, he walked directly past the house every day. It seemed to him that he would have to find out more about her soon, whether the "beginning" were to be cheapened by his inquiries or not. The amount of pleasure he got out of just remembering that woman was a wonder to him, and the hope of knowing her better some day was a joy and a support to him. From the sort of ivory frame, rich and creamy, in which memory

THE DIFFICULT MINUTE

had placed her, Miss Penryn dominated him, waking or sleeping.

During the next week he was at Thorley's a number of times. There was no other place to go, and Mrs. Thorley's room, with its glowing fire and cushioned chairs, was inviting. It was up there, one blustering evening, that Thorley said to him suddenly, "Henderson, I wish to goodness you'd quit your hesitating, and come on in here with us."

"Why, I did n't know that I was hesitating."

Thorley gave a peculiar grunt, and then went on, as though some things were too patent to be talked about: "You seem to think it's wrong for me to do a little good to these howling hyenas I cage up here, just because I do myself a lot more. That's about the size of your argument. Why, my principle is the principle every syndicate and every trust fattens on. Do somebody else a little good, and do yourself a lot more. It's

HENDERSON

the Penryn principle, — and look at Penryn.”

“And look at this bilious town,” replied Henderson. “It’s jaundiced with Penrynism.”

“Oh, come off! If it was n’t for Penryn, this town would be a sand-bar in the Missouri River. It’s Penryn that worked the railroad in, and Penryn that got the elevators away from the river, where the grain-boats could n’t come no more, up to the depot, where trains can come. It’s Penryn that got the mines going, and Penryn that’s getting us electricity for the cars. You need n’t tell me that kind of a man don’t deserve credit. It’s good religion to call him a cheat and a rascal, and I guess he’s all of it; but he does things that other people get the benefit of, no matter how you look at him.”

“Has Mr. Penryn any children?” Irresistibly quick, the question clipped through the barrier of the careful days with bullet-like radicalism.

THE DIFFICULT MINUTE

"Lord, yes. Them three boys at the Bank 's his."

"Any daughters?" Henderson sat up straight, to let the questions volley as they would.

"He 's got *a* daughter."

"Is she here?" This close to that woman again, this close to her name even, she seemed to step down from her frame and to come toward him, richly alive, with all the promising significance she had had for him that first evening. There had been nothing in his life more foolish than that woman's effect upon him, and nothing more vital. He was trembling as he waited for Thorley's answer.

"Is she here now, Zu?" called Thorley to his wife, who was bending over some knitting, close to the lamp. "She's nothere much any more." Thorley raised his voice and called again, "Zu, is Mrs. Shore here now?"

"Purl one, two — wait a minute — purl

HENDERSON

two — that's it. Why, yes, she was to come in on the night train. She did n't make out her visit to her father when she stopped on her way up from St. Louis a week ago, because her husband came down from K. C. for her next day. He's that spoiled about her. So now she's down again for a few days."

"Where'd you ever meet *her*?" asked Thorley. It was strangely as it should be that Thorley's emphasis unconsciously put that woman on a pedestal, high and white.

"Why," said Henderson, like a man in a fog, "somewhere — a long way from here — if she is the woman I think she is. What does she look like?"

"Queen. And she rules, let me tell you. She's the one person living who's been too much for Lowry Penryn. They say this town owes a good deal to her." Thorley chuckled as he continued: "They say she's headed Lowry off a time or two." He put his clumsy thumbs together and leaned toward Hender-

THE DIFFICULT MINUTE

son a little. "Say, Henderson, I don't mind telling you that Penryn's agreed to back me a long way further on the serum. We are going to buy Al Hickam's farm, down Weaver Road, for the cows, and we are going to work the cure for all there is in it. And there's plenty in it."

"So." The word clumped at Henderson's ears heavily, without interrogation and full of finish. "That's good."

He recognized that what Thorley had just been telling him had set him fairly back in the old-clothes Dixburn period, without any of the bitter vigor and combativeness of that period. In two seconds he had become as pallid and anæmic, as unable to fight for his ideal, and as little desirous of fighting, as though Alden had never existed, as though that woman in the frame had never existed. She had n't ever existed. That was the worst of it. He knew what Thorley was going to say next, and as he picked up his hat and coat his answer stood out in his mind with

HENDERSON

great clearness. It was about the only clear thing in his mind. He was going to accept Thorley's offer. That was all there was to it. Nothing could be simpler. His upper lip strained back from the simplicity of it, and his nostrils widened fastidiously to let the simplicity of it down his dry throat. The next thing was Thorley's voice : —

“ Tell you what I 'll do, Henderson : I 'll guarantee you three thousand for the first year. After that there will be five, and after that ten, if there 's a cent. And there 's always a cent in a Penryn deal. Will you take it ? ”

“ No,” said Henderson. That was simple, too ; but his mind, crouched low to receive the expected blow, lumbered through a good half minute as though the blow had really fallen. Then he put on his hat, said good-by to the Thorleys and went down the steps, all his nerves alive again, and flashing jubilant notice to his brain that he had n't been able to get down to that lower plane

THE DIFFICULT MINUTE

even when he had wanted to; that he had underrated the protective value of his ideals, had underrated himself there in Dixburn. He might have trusted himself then, as he could trust himself now, to hold out for the right sort of finish, as right went with him. He was bound to do it. He could n't do anything else. "That's the good thing about it," he told himself. "Could n't strike that gait even when I wanted to. Lord, Alden, it was a precious leaven you gave me." He deliberately stopped on the street and hugged himself. "It's bound to keep you quick, you old lump," he said. Then, as he was opposite the Penryn house, he looked over that way. The shades were not drawn in a book-filled room on the lower floor and through the street window he could see the warm red glow in which the room lay. As he stood looking, his arms folded, his head high, his face still keen with the stress of the minute he had just lived through, a woman came into the room and stopped

HENDERSON

before the fire, her hands clasped behind her. Her tall form and the delicate contour of her face were silhouetted distinctly for Henderson. Presently, with a little startled movement, as though she felt what she could not see, she stepped to the window and drew the shade close.

On the outside Henderson took up his homeward journey with long swift steps.

“And I guess I’ve got to learn to stand remembering,” he told himself quietly.

II

THE LIFE ON THE TABLE

FIRST Shore heard the clock tick; then a bird on a telephone-wire shrilled a glad note at the spring sunshine; then the clock ticked; then his child in the nursery above laughed happily; then the clock ticked; then a man with small square boxes in his hands called from the middle of Independence Avenue, "Berr-wizz! berr-wizz!" then the clock ticked; then the car at the corner dragged its cable with an ugly, snarling noise; then the clock ticked —

"Good God, Henderson!" he cried from his rocker to the man in the swivel-chair, "will you stop that clock!" He raised a closely bandaged arm with an impatient jerk that made him wince with pain. His free hand was trembling, and there was a close, fine perspiration on his face; yet almost

HENDERSON

instantly he took up the clock's rhythm half laughingly. "Thump-her-in," he said, "thump-her-in; no-time-to-lose; got-to-die-young. Lynn, you've been a good wife to me, but if you ever buy another clock that ticks-ticks-ticks, I'll divorce you sure." He got up and crossed over to the open window, where a woman was standing. He put his arm over her shoulder and pushed aside the lace curtain, shrank strangely from the sunshine and the woman, and came back to his seat with a little hysterical gulp.

"It's leaving you," he said to the woman. He had slouched his huge body down into the chair, and his head lay back heavily. "That's the thing that floors me, the only thing. — Oh, hell, I'm lying! It's the big thing, but 't is n't the only thing." Again he got up, restless as a chained wolf, and came over to her. "Look at that sunshine; look at the size of this house; look how thick our carpets are; look what a beef I am! It's got no business to turn out like

THE LIFE ON THE TABLE

this. I'm not half through. It ought n't to be, it shan't be." He dropped into the chair at the window, and began to choke in his slow, sobbing breath, and the woman turned her face to him.

"Risk it, Hard," she said. "Why don't you? You must. Is n't it a chance? Risk it." Her voice rocked like a bounding wire under its weight of doubt and hope. It went crazily from command to question, and she seemed swung far out on it over some abysmal gulf of perplexity. Once she turned toward the man in the swivel-chair, with a wild strain on her face; but he was not looking at her, and she turned back to the window quickly.

Again the other man regained his self-control with one of his crinkled-up chuckles; he put up his hand and held to the woman's arm. "Don't you get cross with your baby, whatever you do," he said, looking up at her with a deep and tender adoration. He pressed his hand lovingly into the firm arm

HENDERSON

and pulled up by her. "Risk it? Risk this? Oh, life, life!" he cried, with his head bent down to hers. Then he lifted her strained face and made her look out of the window. "That town yonder, — see it? It needs me. I'm predestined to make it a bloomin' good mayor, one of these days. It'll miss me. It may do for me to run the risk, but what about the town? D' you think Kansas City can afford to risk me?" The self-appreciation seemed appropriate rather than uncouth, casual rather than conspicuous. He was so virile, so big and coercive, that it would have been a pity for him not to appreciate himself.

"If I risk you, if I'm willing to," began the woman, dropping the curtain between them and the city, — "if I risk you, the town can, and you can risk the town." Her eyes were keen and dry, and she held him a little away from her, with her hands on his shoulders.

A sort of shining joy came out on the

THE LIFE ON THE TABLE

man's face at her words, and he clung to the suggestion in them hungrily. "Do you mean that, all of it?" he asked. "You old darling, why don't you speak the language oftener?" The wonder and the humility which must have been his when he first won her were manifest in his face and in his voice. He had got used to everything else, to a good degree of local fame and to fortune, but he had not got used to her. To an onlooker he was half pathetic, toppling as he did with his great weight toward her; and she was half minatory,—it looked so easy for her, in her lithe and pliable youth, to bend aside and fail him.

The man in the swivel-chair had thus far kept up a ceaseless tattoo with his thumb-nail against his teeth. When finally he stopped the tattoo, it was to throw his arms back and pound on his chest once or twice.

"I guess you are wondering about now why I dragged you up from Penangton to

HENDERSON

pass on me, Henderson," called the man at the window, with some appreciation of the other's impatience, "long as I ain't taking your word for the final word very fast; but I tell you what, old man, you've disappointed me for fair. I thought you'd have good taste enough to agree with me, and let diagnosis go hang. I knew you were n't sensational, and I expected you to say that the other chaps were on the wrong tack; but I'll be doggoned if you are n't proving up the bloodthirstiest of the lot. What the dickens you got against me, my friend — what you got against me?" He could talk foolishness with a whimsical assumption of gravity, and his wide, handsome face now mocked Henderson with unsmiling interrogation.

Henderson wondered afterward just what pathological change his own brain presented after that witless question had cut its way in and out. He began to beat his hands together softly and to talk rapidly, in the way

THE LIFE ON THE TABLE

he had when he wished he didn't have to talk at all : —

“ What I got against you, Shore, is your symptoms. I wish I could unsay what I've said, or put a little sweetening in it, but I can't do it. The last time I talked with you in my own office in Penangton I got afraid that Lahn and Carey had your case down about right, and now I know it. At least I know that lump on your wrist is too near to being a spindle-celled sarcoma for you to fool away any more time on neat little compresses and quiet little rest-cures ; the thing for you now is a sharp little knife. If you don't take that thing in time, — and the time's now, — you might as well shut up that real-estate office of yours at once and be done with it. All the real estate you'll need will be a bunch six feet long by two wide ” — Henderson stopped abruptly, unable to get the right hold on this line of talk ; the things he usually said to people whose lives were in danger and whom his

HENDERSON

knife might save were not coming to his mind readily, and were not fitting the situation when they did come. The jokes on which he was accustomed to ride his patients into an easy familiarity with danger seemed unable to bear the weight of the big man in front of him.

Henderson did not look at the woman, but he got a sensation that she understood, and that she was doing what she could to make it easier on him when she said: "Hardin, the time's gone by for talking; the time's going by for acting. You must stop this foolishness. The operation itself might be much more serious: you have as good a chance as anybody to rally from it." She pushed him back into a chair, and stood over him with a strong, maternal protection, for all he was so big and stalwart, and she was so straight and slender. "He has as good a chance as anybody, has n't he?" She looked at Henderson with the earnest concentration in her eyes that was always in

THE LIFE ON THE TABLE

them, like unused, expectant lightning, when she looked squarely at him.

"With the right operator he has," answered Henderson, and wondered what she thought he meant by that.

She was urging on the man in the chair again, as though she had not heard Henderson: "Say you will risk the operation, — say you will."

Her husband buried his face against her, and gave up the fight with an awkward, gigantic helplessness. "Why need I, when you're saying it, boss? You hear, don't you, Henderson? I'm to risk it." The woman pulled quickly away from him, with an expression of relief that remained perplexed, and the big man rose to his feet. "But there's one thing I want your lily-white hand on, Henderson," he continued banteringly. "You got to promise that you'll do every bit of the work yourself." Through his banter ran the important, well-fed man's jealousy about himself. Now that it was

HENDERSON

coming to the pinch, he plainly did n't like the idea of being subjected to handling and analysis that would be purely scientific, purely impersonal; he even had a superstitious feeling that such a dry valuation of life was likely to invoke death. His personality had always meant a great deal to him, and he shrank outspokenly from being viewed as material instead of as Hardin Shore, rich, fate-conquering. "Life means a heap to me," he went on insistently, "and I ain't putting it into the hands of anybody but the chap I can trust, the chap that knows what and how much I have to live for," — he held out his hand toward the woman, but she stood quietly back beyond his reach, smiling at him; — "and I'm going to put the whole business into your hands, Henderson. I'm going to be yours to bind or to loose, as you will and can. Understand? Will you do the work yourself?"

Henderson turned nervously from the unreasoning sentiment of patient toward physi-

THE LIFE ON THE TABLE

cian which, in its helpless emotionalism, so saddles a man with responsibility. He shook his head vehemently. "No, no!" he said. "Let Lahn operate. He's the one. He's the very best here. Why, Shore, I'm only a country surgeon, at most. Let Lahn. I can't do it—I can't operate on you—I can't take your life into my hands—I don't want to—"

"All right, sir,"—the other man held up his afflicted hand by way of unpromising emphasis,— "all right. You see, don't you, Lynn? Shows how much he believes in it. You won't operate, eh? All right. One thing for sure, nobody else shall."

The woman put her hand on Henderson's arm. "What do you mean by hesitating now?" she asked imperiously. "What do you mean? Why, we trust you. You can trust yourself. It's the only way. You must trust yourself. I'm not afraid; Hardin isn't. Should you be? Why, I've had so much trouble to get him even to consider it. He

HENDERSON

never would have, if it had n't been for you. He believes in you. Every fibre of chance he has hangs from you."

Henderson looked down at her grimly. "You know I like responsibility," he said. "Pile it on." Then, with a violent splintering of his thought, he cried wildly: "I tell you I'm afraid of myself! His life means too much, to you, to himself, to hundreds of people — to me —"

"I can't help that," she persisted, as ardent as he. "You've got to go all the way. You can't refuse, you can't turn back now; you dare not."

The same tragic mixture of pleading and command was in her voice again, making her half-admonitory angel, half-tearful woman, and her face was becoming so tense that her husband came quickly to the rescue with his ready capacity for forging a finish to anything which he had thought worth beginning.

"Henderson, I may have a spindle-shanked

THE LIFE ON THE TABLE

sarcoma in my hand, but you've got one in your head. 'Tis n't normal for a surgeon to have to be coaxed to operate. Responsibility nothing! I'll take the responsibility. Will you operate?"

"Oh, yes, yes," said Henderson wearily.

"That's better. Why, man alive, you've made me feel that my old arm can't put up a real interesting case for you on the table. Go 'way; I'll get you in a box yet before you're through with me."

He was deliberately talking and laughing himself out of his first hysterical antipathy to the operation into his usual orderly good nature. His big, powerful shoulders had squared back, and the danger he was about to brave was passing from a great potential tragedy—the tragedy of risking life when life means wealth, power, happiness—into the flat, every-day fact that he was going to be operated on, going to take some chloroform, and going to get off the operating-table and go about his business again.

HENDERSON

"Now the question is, when?" he asked next, with the peremptory manner of a man who is accustomed to run his affairs on schedule time.

The woman looked at Henderson smilingly. "It's fine to have him good at last, is n't it?" she said. "Better not give him time to undergo any sea-change. I suppose you want to get back to Penangton, too, just as soon as you can?"

Henderson furrowed a long straight line in the carpet, between himself and the two opposite him, before he answered. "If you insist upon leaving it to me, I'll arrange to get you into Miss Maguire's Surgical Sanatorium to-morrow, and I'll operate the day after, or the day after that. No use to sleep long on the matter. If we are going to enter the lists, the sooner we do it the better." His pleasure, as he again got hold of that old ability of his to handle himself, to catch step with fate and go marching on, lit up his face like a streak of pallid dawn. During

THE LIFE ON THE TABLE

the last year of his life, ever since he had met the woman before him, he had required and obtained a great deal of himself, had put himself in the way of a good many crises, and had never yet failed himself; but the last time he had lived through a sight of her husband's affection for her, the last time he had blistered in the warmth of the husband's friendship for him, he had promised himself that he would keep away from crises in future. Still, here he was, in their house again, at their invitation, their entreaty, and forced to stand there before them with the delicate scales of life and death in his unwilling hand. Henderson's life as physician and surgeon had not been a quiet or an easy one, and before this he had had occasion to wish that a few respectable trials, "like death," he would say, might enter into his experience. His trials had been such tiger trials; their claws had dug so deep into his sensitiveness. It was not a small thing for a man with Henderson's capacity for suffer-

HENDERSON

ing to be able to "handle himself," and it was no great wonder that he took an unthawed, frosty pleasure in it.

"So, then, Shore," he concluded capably, "the thing for me to do is to corral Lahn and Carey and MacWhirr, and have them with me to see that you get a fighting chance, and the rest we'll have to leave to your lucky star." He laughed wholesomely now, a surgeon's confidence-inspiring laugh.

"Now you are talking sense," said the big man cordially. He moved over to the open fire beside the woman and put his well arm about her, crumpling her to him with his big masculine strength, while Henderson stood there facing the two. Then suddenly Shore, glad in the relaxation of having his physical problem settled, glad in his wife, glad in his friend, held out his hand in his good way. And Henderson was able to take the hand, his eyes staying on Shore's eyes, not seeking hers for a flying second. Yet some electric

THE LIFE ON THE TABLE

circuit was completed as the three stood in that close companionship, and somehow he knew that she understood how it was with him ; and somehow he was glad to have her know.

Then instantly she showed that she had everything in hand and would be able, with a peerless justice, to help him get the most out of himself, so that he might stand unshaken on the heights of a rare friendship.

“Yes, now we must all talk sense,” she said, taking up her husband’s word lightly ; “now we must all set our faces steadily toward the task in hand.”

“Steadily toward the task in hand,” repeated Henderson, his eyes on hers at last.

As he said it, he knew that the stinging agony of saying it, the still strange triumph of saying it, would forever abide with him.

“All right, sir,” interposed Shore, still gripping Henderson’s hand ; “and operation being the task in hand, this is your affair from now on ; I’m not concerned in it any

HENDERSON

farther. But see here, I tell you what I am concerned in : I've a deal on with a railroad for to-day. I need just one last hour at the office. I can go, can't I? 'T won't hurt if I take the carriage, will it?" He seemed willing to turn authority over to his physician, but unable, from long authoritative habit, to do so. He began every sentence as an assertion, and the question only curled in lamely as an afterthought. When Henderson had given him a niggardly consent to do what he was going to do anyhow, Shore turned from his wife to the door. He came back, with his hat in his hand, a moment later, and shook his finger at her. "You are a nice lot, you two," he said. "I hope you are satisfied, but I doubt it. I doubt you'll be satisfied till you get that chloroform-cap over my nose —" He left off suddenly because of the look on his wife's face. She put her hand to her mouth in an unavailing effort to push back a short, sharp scream.

"You, Hardin!" she cried; and when

THE LIFE ON THE TABLE

he had come to her and had taken her into his arms, she laughed and trembled, and rubbed her face against his with a clinging, forgiving reproach. "What do you say things like that for? You must n't. It is n't so easy for anybody concerned that you need make it harder."

Her bosom kept heaving in a broken, helpless way even after he had gone out of the house to his carriage, and Henderson held his eyes away from her while she stood at the window trying to regain her composure, and talked to her lightly of Penangton, the little Missouri town that was now his home, and that had once been hers.

"Oh, yes," he said. "You have n't been coming down to Penangton often enough lately, and the calacanthus bush in Mrs. Thorley's yard is 'way ahead of yours. Its buds have popped."

She swayed abstractedly with the curtain, to which she was holding, and against which her head was pressed. "I know I

HENDERSON

have n't. I suppose Pete forgets to dig around my bushes? I have n't been down all spring."

"Mmmh! I guess I know that." Henderson whistled softly, and went and stood by the other window. "Why have n't you come down?"

"Oh — I don't believe I know. Hardin, I expect. I get uneasy if he is out of my sight." She held her curtain back suddenly, and looked sharply at Henderson. "What's the real danger?" she asked. "Other people come through all right. What's the real danger with Hard? There's something special, is n't there? What is it?"

If there was one thing that Henderson was coming to hate more than another, in his business of being the doctor, it was the constant metamorphosis of him from man into physician that went on under his very nose, and that he was powerless to prevent. People were eternally demanding it of him, and he was eternally meeting the demand,

THE LIFE ON THE TABLE

involuntarily, like clockwork. A man had spoken to her, from behind a curtain, a moment before; a physician pushed the curtain back, as she had pushed hers back, and his answer was as straight and sharp as her question: "The real trouble with Hard is the big physical hold he has on life. It's one of those foolish paradoxes that are true. It's like this: Hard is so everlastingly alive, and there's so much of him to be alive, that he is bound to feel a physical shock more, and to smash down harder, than a wiry, nervous man would. I've got to knock his feet right from under him; and it's his feet that Hard stands on rather more than the next man. I guess I ought to tell you frankly that there'll be trouble if I can't put the operation through in a rush. But I will put it through that way. And he'll rally." Henderson stepped back behind his curtain and drummed on the window. "He's got to rally."

The woman moved back behind her cur-

HENDERSON

tain, too. The lines of perplexity, confidence, anxiety, and admiration that had been on her face all the morning became more strongly marked. "It has awful responsibilities, surgery, has n't it?" she said slowly.

"Yes, awful," answered the man behind the curtain.

Three men, in white duck aprons, short duck jackets, and close white caps, stood in one corner of a large light room and talked comfortably, calling each other by their untitled surnames with the relief of men who know what it is to have a title eat up individuality. They were men of widely different personalities and unlike appearances: MacWhirr, the Scot; Lahn, German to the last drop of blood; and Carey from Kentucky. But for all their dissimilarity, on the face of each was an expression so dominant that the three looked like brothers. It was the eager stress of men who have the same life-work, appealing to them in the same degree

THE LIFE ON THE TABLE

as important and interesting, who find themselves face to face with an opportunity for the work, and who are glad of the opportunity. The pulses of the three were going steady as time, yet the room was charged with nervous energy. The faces of the three were as shut against emotion as three graves, yet the minds of the three quivered with emotion; and recollections, influences, brought back from sharp battles with death, were continued from mind to mind with telepathic vividness.

“Who’s anæsthetizing, Miss Morse?” The Scot turned from his colleagues to a young woman who was dipping a handful of gleaming steel into the enameled tray that formed the top to a spare iron table.

“Dr. Henderson has young Wear and Mason down there with him, but he’s doing the anæsthetizing himself.” She smiled knowingly at the men; she appreciated as keenly as they did that an operator has no business to tire himself out with the anæs-

HENDERSON

thetic. "The patient would n't have it any other way," she explained.

Lahn, who was chief consulting surgeon to most of the Kansas City hospitals, and known far and wide through the Valley states as a very safe man behind the knife, spoke next: "Ever see Henderson operate, Mac? No? Well, he's 'way ahead of me. Yes, he is. You've got a treat before you. What a man with his nerve fools away time over materia medica for beats me. Cleanest, quickest, stubbornest operator you ever saw."

"What's he abidin' down in that little town for?" asked the Scot skeptically.

"Why is it, Carey, anyhow?" Lahn took up the question as though it had long interested him. "You're his friend. Why don't you get him up here? I want him for the Hospital. Besides his ability, he has these Shores back of him, and if through him we could get Hardin Shore on the Directory, and Mrs. Shore at the head of the Ladies'

THE LIFE ON THE TABLE

Auxiliary, the Hospital would be in luck already. Why won't he come?"

The man from Kentucky looked immutable. "Search me!" he said. "I've done my best to get him here, but every time he backs down. I take it he has some private reason for not leaving Penangton. Got a girl down there, like as not."

Another young woman came to the door. She had run through the hall from the elevator, and she was panting a little. "Dr. Carey, they are having trouble getting him under. Dr. Henderson would like you to step down a minute."

Carey and the girl went off down the hall with the long, light step of their kind, and presently got off the elevator on a lower floor. As Carey caught the swift, treacherous wave of the anæsthetic he hastened his pace unconsciously, and passed on into a luxurious room, where on a narrow white bed lay what ten minutes before had been a well-coördinated man, but what now might

HENDERSON

as well have been ox or bull or beef, for all the promise of resurrection in the face. Henderson, at the head of the bed, was bending over the face and pursuing it relentlessly with an inhaler cap. Back and forth thrashed the face, and dogging it, riding it, came the cap in Henderson's hand.

"Carey," said Henderson, without looking up, "I've got to push him to a finish somehow. He's been bruising his lungs on inspissated air long enough. I can't get him under, though, as long as he has hold of that hand." Henderson nodded at the patient's big hand, which was shut like faith around a woman's hand.

The woman looked up at Henderson with wan, self-accusing apology. "It was a mistake, was n't it?" she whispered. "I still can't get away."

"Oh, he would go to sleep with Mrs. Shore's hand in his," answered Henderson laconically to the inquiry in the face of his colleague; "and without meaning to, she's

THE LIFE ON THE TABLE

holding him this side of Lethe. See if you can get her hand away, will you?"

Presently the Kentuckian raised up, red-faced and puffing. "Why, Henderson, I'm dashed if I can untangle him." Carey stooped again. "Just alive enough to swing to her. Uh-uh! I'm afraid, if they're to be parted, you'll have to do the parting, Henderson. I have n't the muscle. Peculiar case, eh!"

Henderson's lashes dropped down over a long, yellow gleam in his eyes, then straightening up to let Carey take his place, he gave a short, harsh laugh. "Peculiarest case you ever saw, Carey, — for half a hundred reasons. He's been using that hand as a rudder through the waves of a can of chloroform, more or less. Whew! He's fought me every inch of the way. I'm tired before I begin." But he mopped his forehead, and without an instant's delay bent over, and with his supple young fingers uncrinkled the heavy hand from the white, bruised one

HENDERSON

within it. Twice he straightened out the powerful fingers ; twice they clamped back like jack-knives ; and the last time Henderson's hand and the woman's hand lay shut together within the strong grasp.

" Oh ! " she gasped, under her breath. " Oh, don't ! It's pushing a drowning man under water — it's cruel — he's so helpless. Oh, don't do it — he needs me — don't — " She had gone to pieces, in the way people have when doctors most need their help ; and Henderson kept straight on, in the way doctors have of getting along without help.

" Keep quiet, keep quiet," he growled. " I've got him. Now, Carey ! " He split loose the clump of hands on the bed with one quick upheaval, swept the woman's hand aside, and pulled her from her chair just as the man on the bed lashed out wildly, floundered back, and, under the compelling, unescapable cap, passed on into a deep, stupendous coma.

" See to Mrs. Shore, Miss Green," ordered

THE LIFE ON THE TABLE

Henderson briskly; "and, Wear, you and Mason get him to the surgery as fast as you like. We'll be there before you will."

Five minutes later, the operators, those who were to assist and those who were to stand ready to assist, were flipping asepticized water from their hands into loose-meshed towels, and the girl at the tray had settled back, erect and vigilant as a sentry. Lahn and Henderson were tucking their duck sleeves to the elbow, as they filed around to the table, and talking of little things, which is good for the nerves.

"Awfully nice of you to play second fiddle for me, old man," Henderson was saying appreciatively.

"You ought to pay me back for it by coming up here to live, as I want you to. There's a big business up here for you. Your friends the Shores are here, too. That ought to count for something."

"It does," said Henderson, — "counts for a heap." He called abruptly to Carey

HENDERSON

then: "I'd rather you'd be at the cap, Carey, if you don't mind. Just let Dr. Carey in there, Mr. Wear, and you have the salt solution ready, will you?" The clear, ringing voice was quickly buoyant with mastery. The ground that he was on he knew so completely; he was so strong on it; it was so easy for him to cover the whole surgical outlook with half an eye. Before he had put out his hand to the girl at the tray his mind had got away ahead, and was pushing every adverse possibility down within reach of the hand. The girl gave him a knife, and put her hand back over the other instruments. Then, Henderson, surgeon, with his own life a-tingle to the finger-tips, took up the life on the table, and cut and lifted and twisted with it through delicate ganglia and fascia, in and out around ligament and artery, — now slicing with knife, now snipping with scissors, now squeezing with catch-forceps; met at each need, before he could voice it, by the girl at the tray or the chief across

THE LIFE ON THE TABLE

from him. He began to enjoy the work. He was far up on the cool, invulnerable heights of Science; the man before him was no longer a man, but his case. He was achieving what the chief would call a classical operation, dexterous, clean-handed, watchful, working like a beaver and ordering like a general: "Look to the ligature there, Mason. Steady that arm all you can, Mac. Pull that muscle back just a trifle, Lahn."

"Henderson," interrupted Carey, with an admirable cool-headedness which he had not acquired in Kentucky, "I can't give you much more time."

Henderson raised up from over the case for just one second. "Don't you try to hurry me, Carey," — the words would have been a threat if they had not been a prayer. "You hold on to him. There's a lot of involvement here." His fingers were back at work again, cutting and peeling ever more rapidly. "See that, Lahn. I'll have to get that out, sure as fate."

HENDERSON

“You ’ll have to be a little quicker than fate, then,” said Carey dryly. No man likes to stand at the cap as the gray shadow steals over the face on the table. Without any change of posture on the part of the men, without word or sign, a fight was now on above the unheeding form before them. From being a case the form had become a man again, rehabilitated, reprivileged, by his dire danger, as he hung there on the shaking thread of his pulse. In the twinkling of an eye, his inviolable property right in life had become paramount. It was a moment as acutely personal as though Technique, Skill, Experience, and all the other white handmaidens of Science had become clumsy, wordy unrealities. Each man was formulating his intense private idea ; each man was getting ready to offer it to Henderson, arbiter of fate there ; and each man would, and must, then, according to the Code, stand back and lift not so much as a deterrent finger in the course Henderson should select for himself,

THE LIFE ON THE TABLE

though the danger of that course stiffened a man's backbone with suspense.

"Ain't I right, Lahn?" asked Henderson, a little drawn about the mouth, but hard-voiced and steady-handed.

The chief glanced from the case's arm to the case's face. "Theoretically you are, Henderson, but every second's going against him. Look yonder. Better have a live man with a little mischief sewed up in him than a dead one sweet and clean."

"What's your mind, Mac?" White to the lips now, Henderson again held out his hand to the girl at the tray.

The Scot edged over. "It means you'll have all the work to do again if you leave those nuclei in there, which will kill him then instead of now; but" — he waited a second to catch his cautious national poise — "I believe I'd stop on what's done, Henderson. He's uncommon slippish."

"I don't like to go against you, gentlemen," — Henderson closed his fingers

HENDERSON

around a pair of scissors the girl had put into them, — “but he’s got to have his full fighting chance.” His teeth clamped off the ends of his words as he bent again to the work, — by that one half second of answer over against the others, by that taking arbitrary possession of the life on the table, by that making himself lord dispenser of life and death!

“Whatever comes of it, I did all I could for you, you great, barring hulk.” Henderson never knew whether he said those words out loud or only thought them, but presently he heard his voice reassuringly distinct, and neatly punctuated by the pauses needed to obey his instructions: “Get the salt solution going now, Wear, — he’ll tone up. . . . See his lips now, Lahn. . . . I’m ready to put those coaptation sutures in, Mac. . . . See his lips now, boys. . . . Get me threaded there, Miss Morse. . . . See his lips now, Lahn — see his lips, Lahn — ah, God! see —”

THE LIFE ON THE TABLE

Then came the final word of the chief :
"Guess you did the right thing, after all,
Henderson. He'll come round. Tired, are n't
you? Tedious job, all right. Let 'em trot
him off to bed now. He's safe for fifty
years to come."

III

THE ROSE-RED GLOW

GRAY weather !

Henderson, getting back toward Penang-ton from a visit to a sick man down Weaver Road in the late afternoon of a cloudy day, talked to his mare for company, and glanced out from his buggy-hood across the still fields with a peculiar, aching apprehension. He could feel the distance from house to house along the desolate country road as though distance were a snake-like thing to twist out and sting a man, and he could feel the loneliness of his thought like the chilly, vaporish touch of spectral wings. All the land beyond the rail fences lay solemnly quiet. The chickens, ruffed up under the bushes, the mules at the five-barred gates, looked solemn ; the cows, huddled reck to haunch under the sugar-maples, the dogs on

THE ROSE-RED GLOW

the porch mats, the droopy children at the doors, looked solemn. If a woman came to a door and peered out over the children, she did it solemnly. If a man came up across lots from the ploughing, he came in a sad saunter.

Gray! Gray!

Henderson put his head against the side of the buggy-hood to observe the length and the breadth of it, but it was quickly too much for him. Slanting his lids far enough down to shut out a great deal of it, he tried to evade the rest of it and his loneliness by seeing how it would have been with him at this hour, on this kind of a homeward journey, if it had ever happened that his dream had come true. It could be gray like this, evening coming on, and he would be a little tired, — as he undoubtedly was now, — and he would be urging the mare forward, — as he did not do now, — until he could stop at a house that he had built once in the dream, and jump from the buggy, and look up, — he

HENDERSON

would not let the dream come fast now, he held it back a little, fastidiously careful with it, — and there, in the door, a rose-red glow over her from a shaded lamp or something, She would be standing. “Waiting for me,” Henderson suggested to himself, his lips trembling over the beauty of the words. “Waiting — for me,” he repeated. And she would hold out her hand to him, hold out both her hands, and he would get to her in a hurry, — in the dream he could always get to her, — and he would take her hand, take both her hands, and they would go inside, and she would be his, while they talked and laughed a little and read a little and sang a little, the gray weather hanging futilely without, and, more likely than not, he would keep her hand in his all the time, — yes, surely, keep her hand, — ah-h-h ! the dream-touch of that hand, lingering, confidential, woman-sweet !

He was back within Penangton’s gates, so he sat up and shook himself out of the

THE ROSE-RED GLOW

dream: "Oh, you fool!" he told himself sharply; "always dreaming up some smoke-woman, some bachelor's comfort, always teasing yourself away from the possible toward the —" He stopped with that, and driving on down the street to Toplitz's drug store, he turned his entire attention to the comfort of his mare, stabling her himself in the barn behind the store, petting her, half clinging to her, loath to go away from the little comfort of her soft kind eyes and her occasional affectionate snoozling at his neck.

When he left her and emerged from the stable, a slow fine rain was sifting down. He made his way through it, around to the front of the store, above which he had his office and living-rooms.

"Hi, Henderson! Ain't seen you since you got back from your trip East; stop a minute." There were three or four men around the counter, each in approved corner-store attitude, one foot hitched back a little, the whole weight of the body slouched upon

HENDERSON

the other foot and upon the elbows that were flexed back upon the counter. They greeted Henderson cordially as he came through, asking questions, trying to get at his affairs, earnestly interested, after the fashion of corner-store men.

"Did n't get married while you were away?"

"No, oh no; I was doing post-graduate surgical work," Henderson told them.

"Well, glad you did n't bring a Yankee girl home with you, Henderson; you are one of us now, — take a wife from our home girls."

"Sure, Henderson; lots of nice girls in Penangton who can cook and housekeep."

Followed by a fire of suggestions of this kind, Henderson went on upstairs to his room. Arrived there, it first occurred to him that nothing under heaven can dishearten a sentimental man like the shifty talk of commonplace men who advise a sentimental thing, — marrying, — for an un-

THE ROSE-RED GLOW

sentimental reason, — getting somebody to cook for you. And it next occurred to him that nothing under heaven can make a lonely man feel his loneliness as does the room that he insists upon arranging for himself, with a blank disregard of the consolation in color, in the softness of a hanging, in the readiness of a cushion. All Henderson's stuff was stiff. His chairs were the kind of chairs whose arms seem to double away from you instead of toward you. Over in one corner stood his instrument cabinet, a glass-sided thing that twirled on a pivot and revealed knives, forceps, tenacula, scissors, probes on every side. The cold metallic gleam of the instruments was no colder than anything else in the room. His neat desk, — Henderson was orderly, — an operating-chair, and a hard, worn leather couch completed the furnishing of the outer room; and in the other room there was a carpet, a bed, a chair, a wardrobe, and a washstand. It could not have been worse. Henderson put his medi-

HENDERSON

cine-case on the desk and walked to the window. The room had got on his nerves.

Outside the window the rain was coming down with increased volume and directness. Almost all the people who passed on the court-house side held their umbrellas gripped down closely ; but one girl who passed let hers fall back on her shoulder, when she was opposite Henderson's office, and looked up. There was a smile on her face and a light in her eyes as she bowed to him. She was Miss Penang, the daughter of the lady with whom he took his meals, and, despite some disastrous turns of circumstances, entitled to especial consideration, according to her mother's way of looking at it, because her father's father's father had founded and named Penangton. Henderson watched her as far as he could see her, her smile teasing him and cheering him for an interval. Then he went back and sat down on the leather couch.

So much alone ! So much alone ! The

THE ROSE-RED GLOW

rain beat the consciousness of his aloneness at him in dull cold spats, the walls dripped it, the couch was slippery with it. Why did he insist upon it? Why did not he marry some girl, with a nice smile and a light in her eyes, who could at least cheer him a little? If he were married, he would have somebody to work for; there would be some use in digging out his career, in developing his remarkable surgical abilities, if he had anybody to care about his success, to be benefited by it, to be glad about it. Why not marry? Why hold himself to the measure of a dream? That was what he was doing. Because he had an ideal of a woman's face, a woman's form, a woman's touch, her voice, her sympathetic intelligence, her vital effect upon him, he would look at and think of nothing else, nothing less. It was immensely stupid. He really needed a wife. It was high time that he looked at the question practically, as did other men, who, having missed real romance through deficiency

HENDERSON

in sentiment or hostility of circumstances, hobble on to the recognition of the winter-bitten fact that they "ought to marry." He, Henderson, "ought" to have a home, wife, children. Say that he could not get the ideal in touch, voice, intelligence, vital effect upon him, he could probably get eyes with some light in them, a nice smile, fair intelligence; other men rested with no more, and there was no gainsaying that it looked as though a man should be able to secure some large satisfactions out of the mere fact that he was settled and had somebody to care a little. Why, if he, to-night, here, now, had anybody, anybody on earth, to talk to, to let him lean his head against a minute, he would be happy, or if not happy, certainly cheered and soothed.

He lay back by the couch's one fat silk pillow. Miss Penang had made that pillow for him, and there had been times in his life when, all stuck over with pin-feathers, he had hated it and hated Miss Penang for

THE ROSE-RED GLOW

having made it. This evening, however, flattened beyond himself by his unlovely surroundings, he took the pillow into his arms and clung to it. It was better than nothing. It was a little podgy symbol that somebody had thought about him and his comfort for a minute. Its bright color was pleasing, and a fragrance stole out of it, the mystic fragrance on whose languorous wings women's smiles, softness, whiteness, prettiness go floating by. He laid it down rather affectionately after a while, rose from the couch, and made himself ready to go to Mrs. Penang's for supper.

As he put by his umbrella in the hall in Mrs. Penang's house, he saw through the open door into the parlor. Lula Penang was in there, sitting under the rose-red light of a shaded piano-lamp, idly turning some new music in her lap, and whistling and humming occasional snatches that appealed to her.

"Oh, you?" she said as Henderson

HENDERSON

stopped in the doorway. She put her music on the piano and got up. "If you are going to supper, I'll come along, too; most everybody's through, but I have n't had mine yet." Henderson had sometimes been made restless by the other boarders' insistence that Miss Penang rather systematically "came along, too," but to-night he felt glad that she had waited for him. It seemed kind. He stood looking at her for a moment in a questioning surprise, barring the door with his long slender body.

"Do you know, I like you in that rose light," he said, his eyes about half shut as he said it. The thought that perhaps rose lights in general had more to do with it than the woman who stood under them in particular had come into his mind with a little æsthetic shock.

"No, I did n't know it," the girl before him answered with a restrained fervor in her voice; "maybe I'd better stay here in it then, and let you go on to supper alone?"

THE ROSE-RED GLOW

"Oh no, you don't," said Henderson quickly, that word "alone" smiting him; "no, you come along, and we'll have supper together and come back to the rose light."

That was not much to say, yet Henderson had always kept the thought of the rose light so especially for Her that that much sounded like something to which he would have to accustom his ears forcefully and determinedly if they were ever to be accustomed to it. He was glad that there was no rose-red glow in the dining-room, and that Miss Penang sat opposite him in the direct light of the small gas chandelier overhead. It had occurred to him on the way to the dining-room that this was a practical question with him now, and that it would be better to consider it in direct lights only. In the direct light he could see that, though the girl was young and pretty, her lips were thin and purposeful, and as her mother, a hard-faced woman, came and went about the table, there was a constant disconcerting

HENDERSON

illustration of what that kind of lips made of a woman when she was no longer young. In the direct light, Henderson told himself, with a fine prevision of the amount of nuisance the wrong woman might be in a man's life, Miss Penang had not one characteristic that, coming out subtly on her face or in her voice, appealed to him especially for her, as opposed to any other young and pretty girl, — unless, indeed, it were that light in her eyes. Shining from far back, liquidly, as though it came through the softness and sweetness of occasional tears, it was the best thing about her. Henderson had sometimes wondered if it were really in her eyes when he had first met her upon his installation in Penangton two or three years before; he had not noticed it until just before he went East; but then he had not noticed her at all, except for that unpleasant sensation that she was a little insistent in her attentions to him. Out in town she and her mother labored under an unfortunate reputation of being

THE ROSE-RED GLOW

too anxious for her to marry well, and the other boarders, having made much of it for Henderson's especial benefit, had influenced him into a man's silent resentment about it. That was as far as he had ever got in any conscious consideration of Miss Penang, until there in the rose light and here in the direct light. His conclusion now was that it was a pity that she did not look the same under both illuminations; but just then Miss Penang got up and went into the kitchen for a moment, and when she returned with a plate of hot cakes that she had browned for him herself, the conclusion seemed less final. The cakes were exactly as he liked them.

"It's such an awfully bad night, Doctor," suggested Mrs. Penang, looking through the kitchen door; "why don't you stay down here till bedtime? I should think you'd be lonely over those shut-up stores, a rainy, blue evening like this. Stay down here with Lu and me." They had invited him like that

HENDERSON

many times before, but beyond idling at the parlor fire for a minute on a few winter nights and sitting, unrelaxed and impatient, on the bench in the front yard for a minute on a few summer evenings, he had never profited by the invitation until to-night. To-night, quitting the supper-table, he went into the parlor in the wake of Miss Penang, still a little uncertain; but when Mrs. Penang came to the door and said that, as the curtains would have to come down to be laundered next day anyway, he could smoke if he wanted to, his misgiving began to leave him, and he felt more cheerful than he had felt in a long time.

"Yes, indeed, smoke away," said Miss Penang. She selected a pillow from the array on the sofa where he had seated himself with his head against the wall, and insisted upon his putting it behind his shoulders. Then she stepped over to the piano-stool and sat down in the rose-red glow of the piano-lamp. She looked wonderfully

THE ROSE-RED GLOW

better at once. "Do you want me to sing to you?" she asked, her hands trailing on the keys, her young body half turned from him, her face twisted over her shoulder at him. Already great feathery wreaths of smoke lay between Henderson and her. Half shutting his eyes, he saw her through the fluff of smoke as through a veil, the rose-red glow toning her, the high light in her eyes, the smile on her lips. Seen in that way, he got from her a soothing, complementary sense of femininity without any worry about what she was and what she might become. She was just Woman. "Do you want me to sing to you?" she repeated.

"Mh-hm, please. But low, sing low," he ordered. "I don't know but what I'd rather you'd hum and whistle in that funny way of yours."

She laughed docilely, not musician enough to resent the restrictions imposed and well enough satisfied with Henderson to meet the humor of his painstaking self-indulgence.

HENDERSON

Starting in obediently, she whistled a bar or two, then trilled off softly in a hushed lah-de-dah-de-doo. Then presently the words of the song stole out as well, a whole stanza about love generically, about the fact that birds and flowers and earth and sky thrilled with love harmonies, a long if simple diapa-son that sounded the making of worlds, until the song-writer, oppressed possibly by the eternity in the theme, ran away from it on the fleet-footed refrain, —

“ I love ! love you, dear, none but you ! ”

Through the red glow Henderson noticed by and by that the girl's back was straight. He noticed that her own and her mother's valuation of her showed rather adroitly in the tilt of her head. He noticed that her hair had a soft, babyish kink where it lifted, thick and brown, from the back of her neck. As he sat, he could not see her lips, with their little hovering expression of purposefulness. He could not see any of the indications of the sharp woman of small schemes

THE ROSE-RED GLOW

she would necessarily become as soon as her youth was gone. He could see only her prettiness and the dimpling swell of her nature under the melody of her song. As she floated toward him, draped, as it were, by the dreamy rose-light vibrations, Henderson floated to meet her, not because she was Miss Penang, but because she was Woman. He guessed he would propose to her when she finished the song.

"Love you, dear, none but you — lah, lah-de-doo-lah-de-doo."

"That's it," murmured Henderson; "leave out the words; give me just the lah-de-doo."

"Don't you care for the words?" asked the girl. "I think they're sweet. I sing them as Lynn Penryn — Mrs. Shore, you know — used to sing them, twisted right much. Lynn has a way of twisting things to suit herself, don't you think so, — or do you know her well enough to know that?"

Henderson had about finished his cigar,

HENDERSON

and he now took the smouldering stub of it from between his teeth and sat up straight. The feathery fluff between him and the girl cleared away. As he made no reply, Miss Penang continued casually, "Lynn was to come down from Kansas City on the evening train, so Mr. Penryn told me up at the bank a little bit ago. I wonder if she came? Did you hear any one say at the drug store? She and her husband were both coming; did you hear whether they came?" And when Henderson said no, he had not heard, Miss Penang added, "Well, I reckon she came," nodding her head over it, and beginning to sing the refrain again, —

"Love you, dear, none but you!"

Henderson got to his feet. "I must be going," he said in a slow, absent way. And when the girl, with a disappointed, troubled look on her face, glanced up at him and asked, "Oh, going *now*?" he answered, yes, he must. She went to the outer door with him, and recovering himself on the step suf-

THE ROSE-RED GLOW

ficiently to be conscious of some obligation to her, he tried feebly to express to her his appreciation of her goodness in helping him get through a bad evening.

“ Oh, pshaw ! stay any time that you think the hum and whistle will amuse you,” she told him, with a pleasant intonation, which, conquering her purpose and her disappointment, had an unconscious heroism in it. But Henderson, absorbed now in his own heart's concern, missed this illustration of the tragedy of waste in Love's economy.

He said that he was very much obliged, and put up his umbrella and went down the steps. At the gate he saw that she was still standing in the doorway. Through the parlor window the red light shone on under the half-drawn blind rosily, but the girl, out beyond it in the shadow, looked unrelievedly drab. He started off up the street in the direction of his office, but as soon as he heard the Penangs' front door shut he turned in his tracks and came past the house again, on his

HENDERSON

way to another house, which he did not reach until he had rounded two corners and traversed a long distance on a densely shaded street. He had been growing happier and happier all the way to the house, until, as he rang the bell on its front door, the very hand that he put forth seemed sentient in eagerness.

A servant opened the door, and in the hall beyond the servant a woman stopped as she was passing to the library. The globes of the hall chandelier were red, and as Henderson entered through the door their glow bathed her from head to foot, and made her fully and perfectly the picture, the whole right thing. No need to half shut one's eyes so that the glow might tone *her*. Falling on her face, her throat, her firm, close-draped figure, the glow became at once a part of her, and at once seemed to burn delicately from within outward. She came toward him, with both her hands held out gladly, and he took her hands, and for one lying second

THE ROSE-RED GLOW

everything was perfect, because of her touch, her voice, her sympathetic intelligence, her vital effect upon him.

"Oh, good! Hardin and I were wishing that you would find out to-night that we had come," she was saying, not letting his hands go at once, and looking up at him, that unnamable effect of hers getting into the air around her in broad, wave-like vibrations that were like low music. "Father says we come down to Penangton to see you quite as much as to see him. Hardin admits it. And I can't deny it. What made you stay East so long? We have missed you." Her voice trembled a little, and Henderson got from it an instant impression that she had needed him, too.

"Was it long? It was to me; but still, I thought very seriously of making it longer. I thought of not coming back to Missouri at all."

"I knew it, I knew it!" she cried, with that little grieving shake in her voice, which Henderson could not stand.

HENDERSON

"But I came back all right. How's Hard?"

"Well, so he says. Come in here to him and father."

That was all there was of it, — only one minute in the glow, with her hands in his. Then Henderson followed her into the library, where two very different men greeted him. One, Lowry Penryn, Penangton's richest citizen, was a thin, hatchet-faced man, whose small black eyes were noted as being the sharpest eyes in the state of Missouri, but who had a fashion of looking at his daughter when she was not looking at him, and of not looking at her when she was looking at him. The other was Hardin Shore, rich, self-made, vigorous and expansive, whose ambitions, after leading him into the politics of his home city, Kansas City, were now, so it developed in his conversation, blazing a trail for him straight into the larger politics of the state. He had come down to Penangton on this occasion to consult with his father-in-law

THE ROSE-RED GLOW

about his campaign fund for the governorship of Missouri, and also, ostensibly, to consult with Henderson, as his physician-friend, concerning the possible menace to his health should he enter into the excitement of politics. He was big and powerful to look at, but no healthier than most heavy-bodied, tightly strung men, and the malignant growth that Henderson had removed from his arm the year before had already told its story of constitutional dyscrasia. Shore, who was a precipitate man, set about talking over his purposes there in the library at once with Lowry and Henderson, and Henderson quickly noticed that as Shore talked his eyes avoided his wife's eyes, — as though he recognized that he could hold more adequately to his own notions if he did not look at her, — and that he seemed possessed by a roughshod determination to have his own way which was unnatural in him and disturbing to him.

“And I'm against it. That's what he is

HENDERSON

really trying to tell you," Mrs. Shore said to Henderson, as soon as Shore had finished his story of what the state leaders up at Jefferson and down at St. Louis expected of him and for him. Shore had talked in a dry-tongued voice that tinkled, half with elation over the flattering outlook, and half with sheer physical tension; and his wife, leaning back in her chair, looking from Shore to Henderson, from Henderson to her father, and back again to Shore, a little crinkling play about the corners of her eyes, seemed to have got supplementary evidence from Shore's recital to strengthen her opposition without ever once manifesting any nervous alertness. "I'm against it," she repeated.

Shore regarded her with his lips jerking humorously. "She thinks politics will corrupt me, Henderson."

"Tsst!" Henderson made one of his little demurring clicks behind his teeth; "if politics is corrupt, that's a reason for going into it, not staying out of it. Mrs. Shore would

THE ROSE-RED GLOW

have a more logical reason than that," he said waitingly, a little heliographic flash of understanding, swift and illuminative, playing from her to him.

"Yes. More logical than that." She nodded, her eyes on Hardin Shore's face.

"Well, now, what?" asked Shore, with that affectionate, badgering tone that men are apt to use when trying to draw their wives into admissions particularly pleasing to a husband.

"Well, it's logical, but selfishly logical," she said evasively, yet Shore was insistent.

"Well, say what," he urged.

She let her long lashes trail on her cheeks a moment with a hesitancy that looked essentially virginal, yet essentially wifely, and Henderson noticed how perfectly she stayed his dream-woman even here in the strong white light of the library, how entirely the woman he would have liked to have raise those lashes upon him in that virginal, wifely shyness. Only, when she raised the lashes,

HENDERSON

her eyes swept past him, — with some sort of hidden appeal, he thought, — and sought out the other man. She seemed to see nothing but the other man, with an insistent loyalty and a foreboding comprehension that took in all his deceptive bigness, his unsafe tension, the bluish whiteness of his temples, the little flabbiness under his eyes, the strain that for months had held his mouth back from the expression of something — pain, or nervousness, or ambition — that distressed him. “Well,” she began again, haltingly still, “it’s that I don’t want to divide with the public. I don’t want a public man for a husband; I want my husband for myself, — oh, Hard, you know it, you’ve known it all along.” Henderson knew that in saying this she had somehow doubled and turned on an original purpose to speak her entire mind; but her tone, the look on her face seemed to satisfy Shore utterly. The strain left his mouth for a moment, and he laughed a big, glad, complacent

THE ROSE-RED GLOW

laugh. Though he said nothing, it was exactly as though he said, "Just see how she loves me," to Henderson and to her father. His satisfaction in what she had said seemed to treble by the presence of the other two men ; he seemed to hear for himself, ardently, as her husband ; for Penryn, indulgently, as her father ; and for Henderson, — well, pleasantly, as her friend. The fine, lasting romance of their relationship was heightened almost unendurably for Shore by this three-fold apprehension of it. He got up yearningly, went over to her, touched her shoulders once with his hands lightly, then put the hands in his pockets and began to pace up and down in front of her, after a habit of his. His lips shook a little, and his brow tightened and relaxed, tightened, relaxed. Once, a keen pain twitched across his face, and Henderson, flat back in a chair, with his hands gripped to the chair-arms to keep them from shaking, was not too self-concerned to notice it.

HENDERSON

"Hard," began Henderson finally in a well-ordered voice, "I think that as a friend I ought to say to you that you would better keep out of politics, and as a doctor I say that you have got to." Henderson had long since come to the point where he could say things and do things because they were the things to say and do, but it sometimes seemed to him as though his lax voice and limp body must one day surely betray him; surely he must one day show the cheap automatism with which he went through the saying and the doing of the "right thing."

"Well, but now, Henderson," commenced Shore, his unpersuaded thought finding expression in blunt, downward inflections as he phrased, "you're giving just an off-hand, snap-shot opinion, aren't you? You don't know any specific reason why my health won't permit of my going into politics if I want to go into politics, do you, now? Of course you don't. You've hardly looked at me. You've no real reason for warning me

THE ROSE-RED GLOW

off, don't you see? And, on the other hand, there are big reasons for my not being warned off this time." Shore paused a moment, gathered up his forces and went on stubbornly, "It's a chance for a—oh, for a sort of good wind-up,—I mean a sort of crowning to a man's career,—and my heart's so set upon it that I can't let you and Lynn twist me about the way you usually do,—especially when you have no reason,—you know you have no reason." He was so vehemently reiterative that he seemed to be trying to push Henderson into a position by the force of his insistence that Henderson was in the position; and he seemed, too, to be keeping a peculiar, watch-dog sort of guard on Henderson, on his wife, on himself, particularly on himself, as he walked and walked and walked. "Shucks! Just jumped into an assertion without any reason,—didn't you, Henderson, didn't you?"

That talkative stubbornness of the man brought to Henderson at last the complete

HENDERSON

significance of his stiff-necked turning from his wife's counsel, his desperate clinging to his plan for a political career. With Shore politics was standing out as something that could be used to crowd and push him busily to the end, the end to which disease was remorselessly bearing him. That was Shore's whole meaning, pitifully plain to the physician who faced him in the peculiar, conscious stillness that had settled upon the room.

"Hard," said the physician slowly, "if you'll raise your left arm, straight up, like this, I'll tell you my specific reason." It was a brutally kind fashion of heading Shore off, of letting him see that his deception about his condition did not deceive; but Henderson, bent only upon saving Shore for the woman beside him, risked it. He let his hand fall back, after stretching his arm up by way of illustration, and then sat quite still, waiting on Shore, his hands just touched together at the finger-tips, his eyes narrowed

THE ROSE-RED GLOW

upon Shore, his mind quickly aware that the woman was meeting the blow exactly as he had relied upon her to meet it, as strongly and as quietly. Shore, attempting confusedly to turn the probe of Henderson's insinuation, shot his arm up overhead foolhardily, only to sicken and blanch with pain. Half reeling, he turned upon Henderson, "You — you — you —" he began, speechlessly beyond control in his leaping, unreasoning resentment at the exposure and miscarriage of his plan to keep the recurrence of his disease to himself; but the woman sat on unflinchingly, until Shore dared look at her and move over to her.

"Did you think I did n't know, Hard?" she whispered, her hand finding his. "Do you suppose I have n't known all these weeks?"

For answer he went down on his knees beside her and clung to her and cried like a child. Lowry Penryn stole hastily from the room. Henderson got up and went over to

HENDERSON

the window. Outside the rain was still falling. Its cold spats alternated with the sobs of the kneeling man and the caressing, answering murmur of the woman: "To keep your sweet life so close to the shadow because mine's got to keep there, — oh, I wanted to save you, — I wanted to keep it from you, — I thought if I got busy enough I could keep it back, — I wanted to fool you!" His broken, tortured words were just audible to Henderson.

"But, Hard, that may have been strong, but was it fair, — not to count on me, shadow or no shadow?"

Henderson could hear her words, too, — their fierce loyalty, their strong, young maternalism, the choking hush of her own wild rebellion. He turned upon them purposefully, as they sat together under the bare white light that shone on into their very hearts.

"Hard," he said, in a plain voice that eased by its steady pulling back to the everyday level on which people drank coffee, kept

THE ROSE-RED GLOW

house, bought and sold and chaffed, "Hard, I don't understand what this is all for. I can see that there are some dangers ahead, and that to avoid them you've got to follow the right course, but I can't see what you mean with this morbid conviction that you are done for. Where did you get it? I'm willing to bet that it's auto-infection with you, — I'll bet that you have caught it from yourself, that you haven't talked to a soul since I went away! But even if you have, and have been discouraged, I want to tell you that there is n't the practitioner alive who can name the right time to quit hoping. What have you quit hoping for? What are you taking yourself as a dead man for, when life reaches out fair and straight on half a dozen sides?" Henderson's first perception that in his absence things had not gone well with Shore, that Shore had managed to get into the full swing of taking himself in the wrong way, was by now engulfed in the force of his intention to oppose this new current

HENDERSON

of discouragement, to stop the annihilating sweep of it, to get both Shore and his wife safely out of it.

"Oh, Henderson," faltered Shore in his dull, beaten tone, "I got so tired of fighting. You were n't here. I saw I was done for. I just decided to order my life to a busy finish and be done with it."

"Be done with it!" retorted Henderson angrily. "You are n't done with it. You don't know the first toot of Gabriel's horn, and you could n't tell your summons from a dinner-gong. Just because I left you to yourself a little while, just because I could n't reassure you every time you got a pin scratch, you scare yourself into a lot of fool ideas; you're nothing but a kid, anyway; get up here now and let me look at that arm again, — likely as not it's nothing, some little sympathetic reflex. Even if it's recurrence, it's not final. Did n't I warn you that we might run against snags of that kind for some time? Get up here." He hardly knew

THE ROSE-RED GLOW

himself how much of what he said was true and how much was made to seem true by the force of his intention to create for them a mental atmosphere that would have a beneficent physiological effect. He always recognized himself in an effort of this kind with any patient, but especially with this patient, as an hypnotic force, a power of healing, not as a man. "Now, Hard," he went on, when he was through with the examination of Shore's arm, "I can fix that in just one little half hour. I admit I'd rather it had not lumped up there, but there's no death-knell in the fact that it has lumped. Why in the dickens have you acted like this? Why did n't you wait for me?"

"Henderson," — Shore turned from his wife to Henderson, — "I was afraid you were n't coming back, in the first place, — that got me uneasy, — you know I don't believe that any other doctor has a teaspoonful of sense, — and in the next place, it began just like this before — and — and

HENDERSON

she's been through the anxiety of one operation with me. I can't, I won't, let her life be spent in the strain of a long fight. When I found this thing coming back I — well, it just came to me that I'd get so busy with politics or something else that I would n't notice the pain, or talk about it, so she would n't have the trouble of it." His heroic thought of her now mingled queerly with an increasing relief. The morbidity that had hung over him for weeks had been broken up, and his response to the renewal of hope was ingenuous and childlike. "It was mostly because you went away, Henderson," he said, with a tremulous, shamefaced tearfulness. "Should n't have got into this fool mess of conviction if you had been about. I'll be all right if you'll stay where I can feel you. What made you go away and leave us? Can't you stand us?"

"Yes, I've made up my mind to it," smiled Henderson, the smile and the words being a sort of bond with himself as well as

THE ROSE-RED GLOW

with Shore. "I'll not go away again. And I'll get you, and keep you, in shape. Only you've got to do what I tell you to do. You have got, for one thing, to keep out of excitement. You can't go into politics, for instance."

"O Lord ! I don't care a hang about politics except as a thought-killer," declared Shore, almost blithe in the reaction from his despair.

"Well, then, if that's understood, if you're going to become good, I'll be off now, and come up and arrange about that arm in the morning."

They followed him out into the hall, both showing their utter dependence upon him as physician and friend. "By George, Henderson !" cried Shore at the hall door, "I don't see how we could live without you," — one of Shore's hands rested on his wife's shoulder and the other pressed Henderson's hand ; — "honest to the Lord, I don't see how we could live without you."

HENDERSON

"No, I don't see," she said, in a mystical voice, as she took Henderson's hand, in her turn. The rose-red glow from the hall globes fell full upon her.

"Oh, there are plenty of doctors," laughed Henderson.

"But only one Henderson," said Shore earnestly.

"Only one 'Henderson,'" she repeated, her lips trembling a little, but with that gaze of hers which expected so much of him fixed steadfastly upon him.

"Well, if there were a dozen of me, I'd be yours, all yours; always rely on that." He had both their hands, and he was looking from one to the other as he spoke, and, as he spoke, he got a certain happiness.

"I'd rather have my sense of her, her completeness, than another man's ability to stand another woman's incompleteness," he told himself. On the veranda he looked back to smile at them before he stepped out into the rain, and saw her there, still in the

THE ROSE-RED GLOW

glow, the other man's arm still around her.
"It is not the glow," said Henderson softly,
as though he had saved something; "it's
the one woman. And I'm glad of it."

Then he went on in the rain.

IV

THE TRAIL OF THE TANGLER

THE "Electric" left the Fifteenth Street Terminal in Kansas City in the yellow dawn of an October morning; the car, with its snub nose and projecting forward cage, nosing on like a great catfish across bridges, railroad switches, and cross-streets up to Ninth Street, where it headed toward the town of Independence, Mo., at a smooth, swimming gait. Just beyond the Belt Crossing the motorman glanced back at the conductor for an inquiring half second, the inquiry being, "Do I dare?" and the conductor flashed back at the motorman, "Sure, dare!" The motorman's eyes were shining and the conductor's eyes were shining. The car began to go faster. Beyond Sheffield, in the open stretch with its sprinkling of country houses, the speed was a thing to

THE TRAIL OF THE TANGLER

question, and, quitting the rear cage, where he had been talking to two men, the conductor passed through the car to the motorman out front. Two or three of the few passengers aboard, who were noticing, were glad to see that the conductor was disposed to put a stop to the motorman's foolishness.

In the forward cage the conductor, his breath issuing explosively in steamy whiffs, was shrieking to the motorman, "Jimmy! Mr. Shore says a hundred more if we reach Shore Station in fifteen minutes! Let her go! Let her go!"

Then he passed back through the car, humming, to hide his excitement from the passengers.

"See here," said an uneasy man, plucking at the conductor's sleeve as he passed, "what's this for? Ain't we a-going too fast?"

"Fast?" repeated the conductor, with a look of competency betrayed, "fast?" He passed on haughtily, but turned, on some

HENDERSON

charitable impulse, to say behind his hand, "We *are* runnin' on skedaddle time, but that's an expert at the motor; need n't worry, no matter how fast we go." With that, he went on back to the rear, where the two men were waiting for him, the eyes of both burning with impatience and distress. One of them, a big fellow, who seemed to carry one arm with a little nursing care, and who looked ill despite his great size, thundered impotently at the conductor: —

"See here, Henry, what are we crawling along like this for? If this is the best you can get out of this damned snail —"

"Well, I tell you, Mr. Shore," interposed the conductor soothingly, "I'll let you come through and stand by Jimmy. Then you can see how fast we are goin', and mabby that'll quiet you."

"Let's do that. Let's move up there in front, Hardin." As he spoke the slighter and taller of the two men stooped for a medicine-case that sat at his feet, and with the

THE TRAIL OF THE TANGLER

case in one hand steadied the big man with the other until they reached the front cage, where they took up positions behind the motorman, their urging for speed becoming like the crack of a whip about the motorman's ears.

Ahead of them Jackson County stretched into the pale, gleaming east with the limitless, dipping roll of the Missouri country. Fields where the corn had been shocked stretched off on the right, up the curve of a hill, into the sky, the line of small dun stacks like so many space-markers to the watchers behind the motorman. The tiny red station sheds, the gleam of the silver-white mail-boxes on the fences, the three or four big houses of gray stone, the numerous natty houses of brick and shingle, all marked space in running laps for the watchers behind the motorman. Woods tipped with the blood-red sumach, flaunting hillside sweeps of golden-rod, long, lean pastures, switches of rank horse-weed, — all were etched out, clean

HENDERSON

and sharp, against the eastern light, only to be succeeded by other woods, other sweeps, other pastures, other switches, in a ceaseless, merciless duplication for the two behind the motorman.

“Great God!” cried the big man at last, “there is no agony on earth like waiting.” He forgot the trouble that his lame arm caused him, and flung both hands out in front of him helplessly.

“Careful, be careful,” said the other man warningly; “be careful with your arm, Hard.”

“Careful, nothing!” groaned the big man, his heavy hands working; “what’s the use of being careful about me, what’s the use of anything when she — Now here, Jimmy, you’ve got to do better than this; we’re walking, walking!” He turned upon the motorman vehemently.

“Well, you see, the road being so full of curves, Mr. Shore,” — began the motorman in a faint demur, but letting his car out a

THE TRAIL OF THE TANGLER

little more, his eyes straining toward the east, his muscles tense with his endeavor to reach Shore Station in the appointed fifteen minutes, — “road being so full of curves, I don’t dare go too fast.”

“Go just as fast as you do dare, Jimmy.” Shore’s lips shook so that he could hardly talk, and he turned his wide, well-featured face to the man beside him, in a dumb reliance that seemed to be habit with him. Unfortunately for him, just at that moment the look in the other man’s eyes was appalling. “G-r-r-r-h! It’s no great comfort to look at you! What’s the matter, what do you mean —” The words, begun as a cry of protest, were beaten into a hopeless mumble by Shore’s tempestuous despair. “If you give up, if you lose hope, you!” he cried, and the other drew up quickly. His face stayed as gray as wood ashes, but his tone was quiet and his eyes were steady.

“No, oh no,” he said earnestly, his low voice rich and warm and confident; “it’s

HENDERSON

not that I have given up, not that I have lost hope. Only, you know, I have not seen her myself, I have had to take your impression for my impression, and it's hard to wait till I see her and can get my own impression; that's all."

"Oh, it's awful,—to keep riding on and on,—and we don't get there at all." Shore's thought was submerged by his tears, and came out in fragments like drowned flotsam. That he was dramatically unconscious of the moment's drama, that he was as simple and direct as he was big, was evident from the loose way in which he went to pieces, careless of appearances, shaken inside and out by the emotion that possessed him. The motorman scratched his ear, and the other man looked off into the silver-yellow light in the east. "I ought n't to have left her," sobbed Shore, "but I could n't seem to stay in that house any longer until I had you there with me. You know how it goes with me in my own sickness when I have n't

THE TRAIL OF THE TANGLER

you about, — it 's worse now with her sick," — he took his hand from his eyes and sought the eyes of the other imploringly.

The other, as though beating about for relief, began to ask questions that had been asked and answered many times before on that same morning. "When did Carey see her first?" he unclamped his teeth to say, and while his arm steadied Shore, he was conscious of a tremor all over his own body.

"Why, seven or eight days ago," answered Shore, moistening his lips and leaning nearer his comrade with that same appeal for help, that same close reliance, that same gigantic helplessness. "This was the order of things: We had had a good summer at Mackinac, after that last séance with my arm in the spring, and we left there three weeks ago, she and the boy and I, all well. I was getting along shipshape, so I came straight through from Chicago, and she went down to that forsaken Illinois town of Dixburn. She has a married friend there, and of course

HENDERSON

she was interested in the place because you had once lived there. Well, she stayed there a week, and came on home with her head aching. It did n't quit, so I brought Carey out, and he said malaria. And though that fool's been out every day since, he never once said danger till last night. Last night he said typhoid, and I wired to Penangton for you. This morning she — Why, why, she does n't know even me!" All his profound assumption of her love for him was patent in his inflection. "I could n't stand it. You don't know what it is to a man married like I am to be without her, — without her spirit —" He stopped trying to talk.

"And Dr. Carey thinks that this turn for the worse — thinks that she is in danger?" Shore's emotionalism seemed hard on the other man, whose questions clicked out sharply.

"Why, that's just it, — that's why I'm done with Carey, — told me to be prepared, — aw, I can't talk, — Carey's a fool!"

THE TRAIL OF THE TANGLER

"How many nurses have you out there, Hard?"

"Oh, two or three shifts of them; seems to me I've seen four or five girls around."

"We'll let all but one go. I'll nurse and you can nurse, and we don't want to be cluttered up with too much checked gingham and white apron. How nearly there are we now, Hardin?"

"Just around that curve yonder. Go on, Jimmy, go on! Go on!"

The motorman yielded helplessly, and the car, obedient to his daring, all but leaped from the track around the curve, slid, lock-wheeled, on a down grade for a rod, and stopped.

Afterwards, the rush of that ride across country always stood out in the mind of one of the men as a part—the beginning—of the longer, doubling, twisting trail over which he was to go.

"Thank God and you, Jimmy!" cried Hardin Shore, and he and his comrade

HENDERSON

leaped through the gates that were thrown open.

“Get the doctor’s case there, Tom,” commanded Shore to the servant, who stood waiting beside a light trap at the station shed. “Don’t let that nigger tell me she’s worse,” he snarled on in a stiff-lipped agony, as he read through the gloom on the negro’s face. Hurrying into the trap beside the doctor, he gathered up the reins in his well hand and guided his horses across the car-track, speeding the strong, clean-limbed animals down the country road for half a mile, without word or pause, then up a long driveway to a stone house.

As they came on under the overhanging grove of young walnut-trees, the yellow light of the morning sifted through the leaves and fell upon the house beyond with a wan illumination hateful to see, and the prescience of the house’s disaster lifted like a visible thing and drifted toward the men in the trap, lodging in the trees overhead with a low and

THE TRAIL OF THE TANGLER

mournful rustle. There was a chilling sense of a lost presence in the air, a sense of something lacking, something that had vitalized and irradiated, whose absence left an oppressive emptiness. At the corner of the house a group of negro women stood in frightened expectancy, their hands working in their aprons. Behind the women some small black children gaped wonderingly. The fright, the expectancy were hard to bear, and Shore got down from the trap trembling ; but fright and expectancy were acting like a challenge upon the other man, whose eyes had narrowed and grown steely, and whose bearing showed fight.

Inside the wide hall, one of the nurses came noiselessly to meet them. "Yes,—seventh-day crisis, I reckon, or fourteenth-day," she whispered to the physician, and then drew Shore into a chair. "Sit there for a moment, won't you, until you feel better," she said, taking charge of Shore with an expert recognition of the latent invalidism

HENDERSON

showing plainly now in the drawn lines of his face.

"That's right; don't come for a second, Hardin. But don't be afraid. You have not lost her; you are not going to. Wait here till I send down for you." The physician went up the stairs on his quick feet, and passed into the typhoid patient's room. Carey, the doctor in attendance, stood at the foot of the bed, looking at his case in gloomy helplessness, while over at the window one of the nurses was putting crushed ice into an ice-cap. The little tinkle of the ice mingled with the murmuring voice of the woman on the pillow, and the two sounds were like the tumbling unrest of a hill stream.

"Can't stop that," whispered Carey, holding with relief to the hand of the newcomer, who nodded understandingly, slipped past him, and put his hand on the woman's hand, outwardly the physician only, perceiving at once the crucial signs, the thready pulse, the short breathing, the hurrying delirium.

THE TRAIL OF THE TANGLER

With his ear close to her lips he caught the words : —

“ A long trail, twisting and turning.” Then a rhythmic pause, and the beat of the words again : “ Don’t forget Hardin, he will suffer — I am far along on the tangling trail — ah me ! we go fast, too fast ! ” A flickering, frightened cry ! The physician’s hand tightened on her hand, and for a troubled second she was quiet ; then her eyes opened staringly, flashed, and steadied. “ Garth ! Garth ! ” she cried, and tried to leap up, her eyes wide open upon his eyes, her arms lifted to his shoulders ; but he laid her back, and held her with firm, detaining hands, a sudden illumination upon his face, as wild, as delirious as that upon her own. Little by little her head ceased to roll upon the pillow ; her lips stopped twitching, and her thick lashes drooped till the eyes beneath them were quite shut. Carey came around softly from the foot of the bed.

“ Wonderful past any ’pathy, that touch

HENDERSON

of yours!" he murmured, looking down upon the woman's hypnotic calm. Over at the window the nurse was watching, a trained blankness on her face.

"She will have a conscious moment when she rouses. Will you have Mr. Shore here? She will ask for him," said the doctor in low tones that glided across the air with a musical suggestion more effective than a command. His eyes stayed brilliant.

An hour later the woman, after a briefly conscious interval, was sleeping; Hardin Shore sat in the next room with a look of hope on his face; in the lower hall the two doctors were talking the case over softly, Carey telling what he had done and had been just about to do, the other not listening, but acquiescing and approving, all after the dicta of the Code; in the room assigned to the nurses the two who were to go were packing their traveling-cases in open rebellion.

"Who-all is he, anyway, this new man, I wish you 'd say?" grumbled one. She was

THE TRAIL OF THE TANGLER

the girl who had been last on duty in the sickroom, and there was a significant resentment in her tone.

“A country doctor, from that little town of Penangton down the river where Mrs. Shore used to live, that’s all the who,” answered the other, equally petulant; “a friend who runs the Shores, if I can read anything, — sending people away!”

“And what’s his name?” pursued the first speaker, that trained blankness again on her face.

“Henderson.”

“But his first name?”

“I d’n’ know, — Garth, I believe.”

“Oh, I see!”

“See what?”

A look of ostentatious discretion passed over the face of the first nurse; she would not say what, and presently the two went out of the house and back to the city with Carey.

The people who were left ranged up,

HENDERSON

watchful and alert, under Henderson's leadership, for their fight with the fever.

"It's treacherous, typhoid," Henderson told Hardin Shore in the very beginning; "it will double on us, it will let us hope, it will cheat us, it will lead us on a long trail, the old tangler." He had got immediately at the woman's notion that the dizziness of her head was the ceaseless twisting and turning of an aëriform Something that flew with her, and he expressed himself with an unconscious assumption of her fancy. "All we can do," he told Shore, "is to keep up with it, keep a hand on it, till we tire it out, then pull her back to us."

The Shore child was sent away, and from morning until night there was no sound in the great house, save the coming and going of careful servants and the low whispered word; but through it all, up to the day of the last crisis, the household having responded confidently to Henderson's presence, the house seemed to have lost its

THE TRAIL OF THE TANGLER

prescience of disaster; the servants smiled sometimes, and in far corners of the grounds the small black children laughed gayly.

"I feel that I'm unfair to you, a regular burden, Henderson," said Shore, who stayed near the sickroom helplessly but enviously; "still, I don't know where to begin to stop it. I'm foolish about you. I want you to be in there with her all the time, and when you are not with her, I have to have you with me."

For a number of years Shore, through his own hard fight with disease, had been expressing this sort of dependence upon Henderson; for years, through long tests of friendship, he had been utterly trustful; for years, through blinding mists of passion, Henderson had been entirely reliable, entirely true; for years the woman had stood between them; until now, her eyes always insistently upon Hardin Shore's eyes, her hand sometimes in Henderson's hand in secure friendliness, a delicate protective aura

HENDERSON

playing from her consciousness like a luminous ether, through which Henderson could not look, and would not have dared look if he could.

That had been the way for years. But now, out on the red range of the fever, had not the luminous veil fluttered raggedly back, and for once, whether he would or not, had he not seen beneath it? "Garth! Garth!" she had cried, and had clung to him. Was it all the craziness of the fever, — *had she not known him?* The mad question became a companion thing of that hurrying delirium of hers, leading him on and on after her, twisting, turning, coiling. And over and over he put his hands upon his shoulders as though he must push in deeper the burn of those hands of hers; over and over, as her eyes opened staringly upon him, he told himself that the question reached her and was answered, that off on the devious trail of her delirium she came face to face with him and knew him for himself. When he was not

THE TRAIL OF THE TANGLER

beside her, his forehead would grow cool, and he would explain the whole thing to himself; remind himself that the revelations of delirium were reliable for the purposes of the pathological novel only, not for any honest weighing of things; that instead of being taken as signal flashes from the sub-consciousness of the patient, they should be taken for what they were, distorted gleams, refracted through the media of the fever-hot brain-cells. And finally, whatever this particular woman said in her delirium, the fact remained that in the full possession of her faculties, she handed herself and her great power of loving to her husband more unequivocally, more fully, and more beautifully than any woman in the world. — Then he would go back to her again.

The cycles went by, from seventh day to fourteenth day, to twenty-first day, in the rhythm of the fever, and as he sat beside her, ceaseless in vigilance, meeting the disease symptom by symptom, fighting, nursing,

HENDERSON

quieting, a strange thing came to pass, — he began to see that there were two of him : one, the physician at the bedside, watching the zig-zag climb of the fever, his hand on the jerking thread of the patient's pulse ; the other, a dreamer who, following a trail daringly, found what he sought in a sublimated freedom overhead. To the physician below, the woman's broken words were formless and void, but the dreamer up above shut his soul about them and made life of them.

"I must be going!" she would cry.
"Are you here? Are you ready?"

"Oh, yes, I am ready," he would say, that mystical quieting force of his in the smile that he turned upon her. As she grew still, he would talk on, without the spoken word or the need of it: "Now we are flying free! Now the trail leads us higher, higher! Now we are in our place of dreams!" He would lie back in his chair then and close his eyes, as softly as hers were closed.

"That Thing went fast over the tangling

THE TRAIL OF THE TANGLER

trail!" The fever would be heightening again.

"Did you get tired?" he would say. "I never tire coming up here."

Sometimes the physician was sorry for the dreamer, thinking of the awakening that was to come, but the dreamer was heedless. It was so real to him, he followed the trail so often, that it came about that he recognized his sensations like landmarks along the way, — the first uplift of his spirit, the strength of his soaring, the tremulous joy of finding her.

"The end of the tangling trail," she would mutter.

"I am here at the end. I shall be here always, always waiting," he would insist, a great satisfaction on his face, and would open his eyes to find Hardin Shore standing beside them.

"Asleep, Henderson?"

"No, more awake than ever in my life."

"Is she better, old man? Every time I

HENDERSON

hear you speak like that I think she must be better, must be coming back to me, there's such a joy in your voice, Henderson. Is it true? Is she coming back?"

"Oh, yes, she is coming back, not quite yet perhaps, but she is coming back."

"What is it that she repeats like that all the time, Henderson? Can you understand it?"

"It's dream-talk, — I would n't bend too close, Hard; it disquiets her. You will hear only fragments about the tangling trail of the Thing that flies with her."

"Keeps muttering," repeated Shore wistfully. He put his great hand over his wife's hand, and she opened her eyes and gazed at him for a moment, then some bewildered effort at control shivered through her and she lay still.

"Oh, get away, Hard! That's bad, that's bad!" Henderson pulled Shore up with an irresistible hand and drew him into the next room. "You see, Hardin," he explained,

THE TRAIL OF THE TANGLER

driving himself on to comfort Shore with a singular consciousness that the woman was directing him to the explanation, "her thought has come to be so constantly of saving you anxiety, because of your own illness, that now she is ill her chief worry is that you are in the way of distress about her. It is n't that she does n't know you; it's that she does, — comprehends just enough to be trying to protect you."

The grieved look on Shore's face lifted. "That's right, you old conjurer," he said. "Put me back upon the thought of her love of me. I know, — trying to think of me, even when she can't think."

From twenty-first day to twenty-eighth day! In the blackness of that last night, Henderson, the dreamer, passed out of the Shore house into the grounds. He walked, blindly anxious for motion, over the soft, thick turf, with its shaggy mat of leaves, to the wall around the young orchard behind the house. The night was in the deep after-midnight.

HENDERSON

lull, infinitely quiet ; but Henderson pressed his hand to his head as though to shut out great noises, and peered out into the dense, clinging darkness as though to catch the flight of something that swept past overhead.

If she died ! Foolish, futile thought ! He would not give it place ; he hurled it from his mind. She need not die. He would not let her die. Had it not been his again and again to rescue the sick, to hold back the dying ? She need not die. He knew himself. He was not afraid.

And if she lived ! His the power, — to bring her back to the other man, to bring her back now, bring her home from the wild trail of their going, from the high realm of his fancy, reestablish her in her old relations, not as the free, flying spirit that he had known in that upper living, — ah, God, to do that !

Across the black quiet of the night another figure was vaguely outlined at the

THE TRAIL OF THE TANGLER

orchard wall. Shore was standing there forlorn, one foot on the low wall, his lame arm across his knee, his eyes burning into the darkness, seeking, seeking.

"I am so lost, Henderson," he groaned, as Henderson came up silently. "I followed you out here. I can't stay in that house. You see, with her unconscious, it's as though she is n't here. I'm so used to having her here, Henderson. She has had always such power for being here, all around and in and through me, everything that a man needs to round himself out — and everything else — Henderson, if you only understood what I feel, you would n't let her go, you could n't."

"Oh, stop, Hardin!"

"Time and again, Henderson, you've interposed that will of yours, that power of yours, between death and me; time and again I've felt it like a thing to touch and see; time and again you've kept me here when I should have gone but for you."

"Hardin, do you think I need this urg-

HENDERSON

ing?" cried Henderson, his voice ringing clarion clear in the night's quiet.

"It's because I know your ability, Henderson," went on Shore, bungling miserably, "that I want to know you're using every ounce of it. You will save her for me, won't you, old man — you will save her — for me?"

"Yes, I'll save her for you," answered Henderson, with that final assured confidence which he always used to compel confidence. "Come on back to the house, Hard. It's hour by hour till dawn now." He put his arm through Hardin Shore's arm, and they went into the house together.

Back in the sickroom Henderson, the physician, took up his vigil again alone. He made Hardin Shore wait in an adjoining room with the nurse, and, alone, he sat down beside his patient, the weight of destiny in his eyes. The seconds went by with a little clicking catch in their going, marked by the flicker of her breathing, and she gave

THE TRAIL OF THE TANGLER

no heed to the compulsion in the physician's touch upon her hand. The seconds went by with a little clicking catch in their going, and the physician became the dreamer and began to talk to her, urging himself far out after her, covering the range of the fever with his own tenacious swiftness: "Come back, come back! We may not stop at the place of dreams! It is all over and ended! Come back!"

Tossing, rocking, her head, with its great, tumbled mass of soft hair, came nearer, and her cheek cradled into the hand that he stretched out supportingly.

"Oh," she cried, "the end of the trail at last? The real?"

He put his hand on her shoulder gently. "The real," he said. The last of all reality, it seemed to him, the finish of the wild dream-fancies that had been for him so long the fullest and richest reality.

Her eyes opened, shut, opened and fixed upon him, her tension relaxing, her mind

HENDERSON

clearing, her breathing quieting, the mystic fever-cycle ended.

“Why, it’s you, dear old doctor-boy!” She had come back, the sane, strong, delicate-fibred woman, who for years had been the flower of his fancy, the root of his morality, his courage! The craziness, his and the fever’s, was a thing of the past, the mad aërial journeying was over, she had come back! The physician was sorry for the dreamer as Henderson laid his hand upon her lips and looked once into her earnest, questioning eyes: —

“Don’t talk; you’re back, that’s enough; you’re saved, that’s enough.”

“It was good of you — to save me — for Hard,” she said softly, brokenly, fast growing drowsy again, but comprehending still.

Hardin Shore tipped to the door, his wide face lit with joy, and even as he bent and kissed her forehead worshipfully, his wife was safely sleeping.

Long, quiet days followed, and at the end

THE TRAIL OF THE TANGLER

of one of them, Henderson, still neglectful of his Penangton practice, sat at the window across the room from her bedside. Hardin Shore was in his own room, sleeping off the exhaustion of those weeks of anxiety for which he had been so ill conditioned, and the nurse was out in the young orchard, methodically measuring off her evening exercise. Beyond the window the sun had set, and a soft, thickening gloom lay over the room. Through it the two figures, the woman on the pillow and the man in the chair by the window, were barely visible to each other. She lay with her hands above her head, the new thinness of her face softened by the fall of lace from her wrists. He sat in his chair with his head thrown back wearily, his fatigue lifting and floating away like a gossamer whenever his eyes rested upon her. The physician had remained sorry for the dreamer; the memory of an illusion is hard to bear.

“You are all tired out,” she said.

HENDERSON

"You are all wrong," he said.

"Do you hear the sleepy things outside?" she asked. The katydids were crying and the crickets were chirping in a drowsy remoteness. "It's strange to hear things and see things and know them for what they really are."

He glanced at her comprehendingly, thinking to let her know that he understood the little shock of amusement with which she was finding herself again, but seeing how beautifully her hair lay about her face, and how subtly her grace showed in the languid, swinging movements of her long arms, he was not sure what he had let her know.

"That trail, that tangling trail!" she began next, as though feeling her way, and Henderson sat up and bent forward, his eyes fixed upon her.

"Well, what of it?" he asked, his breath hard and short.

"Well, I don't know, do you?" She smiled at him, but the little shaking span of

THE TRAIL OF THE TANGLER

her voice showed that she was using it to bridge some chasm that yawned before her. She raised her arms and let the laces tumble more thickly about her face; then, looking at him through the veil, asked in an uncertain flare of bravery, "Did it tangle you, too?"

He leaned forward on the arm of his chair and his glance went through the laces to her eyes. "Did what tangle me?"

"Why, the trail that we followed, — did it tangle you, too?"

He had a sudden impulse to candor, absolute and entire, — "Then there was a trail for you, as for me!" he cried, "and you realized —" He stopped in that impulse to candor, for she had drawn the laces closely about her eyes. Seeing her do that, he dropped back in his chair. "I understand," he said, "you need not be afraid."

"No, not of — not of a sick woman's fancies, need I? Need you?" The voice quivered, and the hand above her head closed

HENDERSON

tightly. "There was one fancy," she went on, as though to an appointed task, "there was one about—the place of dreams—at the end of the trail—where somebody—Hardin, I expect—always found me. Did I ever—did I ever speak of that?" Her intention to define for him their old rightful relations touched him like an accolade, raising him, a bewildered knight-errant, to go whither she pointed.

"My, yes!" he answered her evenly, "and next you would cry, 'Hardin! Hardin!' and we should have to scamper after Hard." The laces pressed close to the eyes and the tight hand relaxed. "Oh, you were a nuisance about Hard," went on Henderson in a resonant tone now, his eyes lighting up; "'Hardin! Hardin!' you were always crying."

She began to laugh, tremulous with success under her laces. "I suppose it must have been like that. I could n't always tell what I was doing and saying, whose name I was

THE TRAIL OF THE TANGLER

calling, I was whirled about so, — it was such a long trail, that old tangler's. But if it did n't tangle you, if you understand — ” Her slender clasped hands were raised to him, her voice swayed to him with a fine, remote music like a wind-blown bell.

“ Yes, I understand. And it did n't tangle me,” answered Henderson, folding his arms and striding to the window, where he stood for a moment, a lean young figure, tall and straight, cleanly cut against the light in the west.

V

THE WAY OF THE STRONG

FOR the five days of big wind at the end of the March blowing of 1901 the boom across the ploughed land on the bluff farms of Morning County beat time to the shrill whistling in the timber like the drone bass in *pifferari* music. It was a grand world out of doors, the sort of world that is always unrolling with the whirl of the wind in Missouri, wild and gray and free. In the swales the tough grass dipped and rose in shaking circles ; on the hills the gaunt trees went like flails ; overhead resounded that whistling, roaring diapason. The sting of the air was like a whip. On the bluffs few people braved it. In the hillside pastures the horses battled against it with wide-nos-triled whinny ; and the cattle ran from it to the shelter of the hay-ricks, heads down, lowing uneasily.

THE WAY OF THE STRONG

At Hogback Hill, — the foreland tract in the chain of great tracts in the holding of Lowry Penryn, of Penangton, — Penryn's tenant, a tireless farmer, looked out on the resistless weather in the mid-afternoon of the final day, took the horn from the kitchen porch and sent a reluctant winding call to his hands in the furrows. The hands turned back to shelter gladly, and for the rest of that day the fields were left in the clutch of the storm, while the men sat in the barn, tinkering, mending harness, recalling other storms.

"They 'll be lightning to come," said one, who stood in the barn door watching. "Huc-come me to know is f'm that yellowness yonder. Scampish-lookin' clouds over tha'."

"'T is n't to say cyclone-time, though, is it?" inquired another, who had come from the Northeast, and feared the ways of Missouri.

"Naw, but they 'll be devil's own lightning," replied the old-timer comfortingly,

HENDERSON

and added that it was well to be indoors on such a day. "Takes town-fool boarders to resk it outside!" He breathed the last words in a whistling cadence, his lips tightening condemningly, his eyes fixed upon the two who were running down the steps of the weather-beaten front porch of the tenant's house.

The high-trunked walnut-trees, the black-jack oaks, and the silver sycamores tossed and strained sonorously as the two who had come down from the porch went across the damp mast-weighted grass of the yard at Hogback Hill, scurrying like children, — the skirts of the woman blown out in front of her, her slender body careening with the grace of a ship at sea, her eyes bright, her cheeks red, — the man's hand on the woman's arm, the wind raising his thick black hair, his chest expanding. A strain, as of watching and waiting, that sharpened the faces of both, slackened. Whatever cares oppressed them blew away for the moment

THE WAY OF THE STRONG

on the wings of the wind. The youth and vigor in both were keenly triumphant. As they pitted themselves against the stress of the elements, they were aware only of a glee in their own valiance, their own well-matched vigor. A recognition that they were splendidly complementary flashed from one to the other as he seized her hand and they were swept on to the yard fence, where they leaned, laughing a little and panting hard.

"Oh, yes," he said in a tone which seemed to have a direct reference to some antecedent advice. "You do look better already. You needed fresh air. You can't stay in the house all day much better than I can." He had not released her hand, and she drew it from him.

"I can stand alone," she said. "Yes, it's true that I need lots of outdoors. Isn't it satisfying!" She threw her head back and watched the storm, the high up-rolling of the clouds, the blown grass, the hills where the great trees lashed. "That's what

HENDERSON

it does for me, — satisfies — by expressing.” There was a leaping joy in her voice, as though some deep note responded, true and strong, to the storm.

When she had taken her hand from his he had folded his arms, and he stood now, unshaken in the teeth of the wind, looking down at her, his great love of her hardly restrained. “Does it do that for you, too?” he asked, understanding in his voice. His eyes sought hers and held them. Then, as though to make sure that he understood, he added, “By expressing what? Satisfies by expressing what?”

“One hardly knows what,” she murmured, — “the things that fight toward expression in one’s soul, the blown weakness of tears, the keen strength of joy.” Though some shadow of waiting self-reproach lay like a veil across the light in her eyes, the light was there and the words swelled and quivered up the gamut from grief to gladness.

THE WAY OF THE STRONG

Watching her, he drew his breath in with a trembling inspiration, made a little start toward her, and turned away. The moments of intimacy that came into their days were too life-laden. "Don't!" he said pitifully. "Don't!"

"Don't? Don't what?"

"Don't let me know your soul!" he cried in a strange earnestness of entreaty. "Keep me out! Keep me out!"

The cry was the cry of one on the threshold of his own, fighting himself back.

Her eyes, frightened and storm-driven, sought the flying clouds again, and a little silence fell between them, impenetrable for a time.

"Talk to me of Hardin," she said at last, in a low, reticent voice. "How are we to reconcile him to the loss of that arm?"

Her eyes met his steadily now, all that young leaping strength of hers, body and soul, securely controlled.

"Yes, talk to *me* of Hardin," — he caught

HENDERSON

at the name as at a thing to pull up by and stand by. "Though I've met with a lot of discouragement with him, I'm bound to admit that the worst thing in the whole history of his case is this final apathy of resentment at having to meet the future disabled. All his hold on life seems to have lain in the grip of the hand that had to go."

"Ah, Hard was so big and whole! He has reveled so in his strength, been so vain in the thought of it, — his poor old pride is so hurt, don't you see?" she explained.

"Yes, I see. He is getting restless again, have you noticed? We have had him down here nearly a week. That's doing pretty well. What next? Shall you take him back to Kansas City?"

"No, to Penangton, I expect. He likes to be near you. You can stand it, can't you? Now, as always, his chance seems to lie with you."

"His chance is good. Don't forget that. He is still strong. We shall save him yet."

THE WAY OF THE STRONG

She looked off toward the house, where she could see a man who waited for them at a window. He had one arm through the sleeve of a velvet jacket, and the other sleeve of the jacket hung empty from the shoulder, but he sat up stockily and looked out upon the storm. When he saw that the woman's eyes sought his, he raised his arm in salutation and smiled a halting, absent smile. She lifted her hand and waved to him, then clasped both arms about her own body. "Oh, if I were not so much alive! It's a crime with Hardin like that, — let's go back to him, let's go back!" she cried, with a tumultuous rush of sorrow, and the two started again across the yard together.

The man at the window lay back on his chair and watched them come up the trough of the wind, his thoughts surging toward the woman. "Ah, yes, you! You're something to keep a man, — but you are whole, — and I — lying here in these bandages — dying limb by limb, like a tree, — God! It's hardly

HENDERSON

the way of the strong." He looked down upon the bandaged rigidity of his trunk and groaned. The strong! That was what he had been all his vigorous, successful life, — powerful, intact. He had come up out of the strength of a sturdy, barefooted childhood, on into the strength of a muscle-hardened, poverty-urged boyhood, on into the strength of a seasoned manhood, that had overcome the circumstances of birth, wrested wealth, wife, and happiness from fate, — conquered, after the fashion of the strong. And here, at the end of it all, he was back in the home of his childhood, whither he had crept to hide from his conquered world, while he sought the strength to accustom himself to himself as maimed, as incomplete. He was seeking that new strength still, braced against his wife and his physician; seeking, but not finding it. The marks of his inability to find it had seared his face deep these past few weeks. As he waited for the woman to come to him, his defeat, his admission that his was

THE WAY OF THE STRONG

battle strength, the strength to act, not to stand and endure, lay plainly upon him.

On the weather-beaten porch again, the woman and the man stopped for a moment. The glow was dying from her face. She looked anxious, burdened, as she turned toward him. "It's very good —" she hesitated as though the wind swept the words from her lips, and she swayed a little toward him. If he had willed it, he could have touched her hair with his lips.

"Yes?" he asked.

"— good to have you stand by us, — it's a hard place to stand in, I know that." Her tone was full of a divine sympathy.

"A hard place, but a high place, — am I failing you?"

A flash of glad light came over her face. "Oh, no, you are not failing me, — being you, you could not fail me!" she cried softly, her very confidence in him beating like waves about him.

He opened the outer door for her quickly,

HENDERSON

and she went quickly by him to the door of her own room.

“Stay with Hardin a minute, will you?” she asked, as she disappeared through her door, and he, passing on into the sick man’s room, was greeted listlessly:—

“Well, Henderson, could n’t stand the storm?”

“Yes, — oh, yes, we stood it.”

“We can blow in Missouri, when the notion takes us, huh?” went on the sick man, his voice blank, his little effort at friendly conversation a futile chipping at the shell of despondency about him.

“It’s a monster wind.” Henderson manifested a fresh interest in the barren topic, so different from the other’s lifelessness as to suggest that the one was determinedly opposed to the other. “The farm here gets the full force of it, Hard. Wonder how your pioneer ancestors ever happened to select this bleak foreland to pitch crops on?”

THE WAY OF THE STRONG

“Lord!” — intermingled with an invalid’s querulousness was a little of that interest for which the physician was playing, — “pitched here because they could reap here, — black land this.”

“You spent nearly all your boyhood here, did n’t you, Hard?”

“Mighty near it, — good times those, Henderson,” — he sat up and looked out over the distant hills where the wind swept and harried. “Very good times. And it’s queer, is n’t it, how old times, old places call and call to a fellow. From the very minute that I heard that Lynn’s father had added this farm to his holdings, though I’d forgotten the place for years, why, nothing for it, but what I must get back here and remember my beginning. I was born in that room there,” — he twisted his head over his shoulder, with a jerk toward the tenant’s dining-room. “And look here,” — he waved his hand toward the window, — “see the road over the hill from the river? Many’s the

HENDERSON

time I've tramped it to school with my dinner-pail on my arm and mighty precious little in the pail." He kept his eyes on the yellow road winding uphill in the distance till the fugitive interest passed from his face and was replaced by the melancholy. "But somehow, Henderson, when I indulge in sympathy for myself, 't is n't that hungry youngster I'm sorry for, — it's this one-armed lumpkin," — his voice choked with the thought of the significance of his disaster, and he stopped. Henderson moved up a little nearer silently, and the bitter words began again. "That hungry boy had everything ahead of him, Henderson, and the gnawing in his stomach was to him, with his kind of strength, nothing worse than another prod onward. He had everything to do and every reason to do, and he was fully equipped to do it. I suppose, Henderson, I'd get along better now if there was n't so much behind me, if there was anything left ahead of me that needed doing." That battle strength within him,

THE WAY OF THE STRONG

that impulse toward activity, roused and beat against the bars of his invalidism, but Henderson, welcoming any change from apathy, let him continue. "I could fight with one hand, Henderson, if there was anything to fight for — anything left —"

"Hard! There's a big thing left!"

"Oh, I know what you mean, Henderson, but I don't have to fight for that, do I? She's mine already, is n't she? I want something to fight for. I don't have to fight for her, I have her, if ever a man had anything on this earth. What do you expect, then? Can a fellow like me rock back on his wife's love and his love of her, and end his days watching himself go to pieces? You expect that of *me*? You need n't. I have to do things. I don't know how to stand things any better than a baby. You don't know what you are talking about when you ask it, Henderson. When did you ever endure? You could n't any better than I can, — and I can't at all!" He got up from his chair.

HENDERSON

“God! I’m a crying failure at it. If I had n’t been a strong man, Henderson, — but I’ve lived the life of the strong, — why, with that old arm that’s gone I’ve lifted and carried what two men could n’t budge,” — his face lit with a momentary gleam of satisfaction ; — “why, Henderson, in the old days, in log-rolling time, I used to make big Jim Bard’s eyes stick out an inch by what I could do, and before me Jim was the strong man in these parts. Why, I could roll all day. And I was the stoutest man at a hand-spike you ever saw. Why, just feel that muscle even yet, huh? — ain’t that a lump!” There was something infinitely pathetic in this braggadocio about his past that was stopping for a moment the thought of his future. “Muscle-wrapped giant that I was, — and now maimed, not all here. No, I shan’t stop, Henderson. Question with me has come to be whether you had the right ever to stop me, — a doctor may take too much on himself, — patching a patient to-

THE WAY OF THE STRONG

gether when he'd better go to pieces, — a strong man does n't want to live beyond the day of his strength, — what's life to mean to me now, — going leg by leg, arm by arm, — aw, don't talk, — you've missed your prognosis before, — I know that's the way I'll go; what have you done this thing for, anyway? I'm not so essential to you, am I, that you should have held on to me and fought death away from me all these years? I'd have been finished and good riddance, long ago, if it had n't been for you!"

Face to face with the physician's tragedy of a patient's reproach, Henderson was conscious only of vindication. "It was for her, Hardin, for her. She wanted you saved; maimed or halt or blind, she wanted you saved."

The words came on to the sick man like an arrow to the mark. He bowed his head against the window, and his rage lulled.

"Whatever I've done for you, I've done for her," insisted Henderson; and then,

HENDERSON

seeing that Shore's wife stood questioningly at the door, her face, with its sharp lines of suffering and strain, turned toward him, he beckoned her to his place, and stole from the room.

She came up to Shore and laid her hand upon his arm. "Ah, yes, you!" he murmured, putting his arm about her. "You promised to stay away and exercise and rest for a full half hour." He tried hard to maintain his control of the discord within him, holding her a little way from him and looking down upon her lovingly, for all the strife on his face.

"Yes, but you see, I get restless away from you."

"Awful baby about me, are n't you, — are n't you now, for a woman who has been married to me for years?" The old egoistic raillery slipped from his lips, as she drew him to a chair, where she knelt beside him, her young arms about him. He laughed, a little pleased growl, as she held him to her.

THE WAY OF THE STRONG

"Well, I like it better with you than out in the storm," she said. "It was wild out there. This is safer."

"You had Henderson with you, — did n't Henderson take good care of you?"

"Yes, I had him. Yes, he took good care." He could feel the soft acquiescent motion of her cheek against his face.

"Guess you are safe enough with Henderson."

"Yes." She rocked back on the firm support his big, muscle-corded arm gave her. "I'm glad we have this arm," she said, nesting her head against it comfortably. "Yes, I'm safe enough with Henderson." She smiled into his eyes as she added, "Henderson can hold the storm in hand, of course;" and he missed her deeper meaning, but met her banter with a chuckle that had in it something of his natural spontaneity.

"We think Henderson can do a plenty, don't we?" he assented.

"He has done so much!" She pressed

HENDERSON

more closely to him, and the answering clasp of the arm about her made the bandages across his chest strain for a moment. "He has saved you for me over and over. He has done so much, — say it."

"Yes, yes, — if just being alive is much." His tone was flat and dull again, and his eyes slanted from the head on his breast to his armless shoulder. "But, Lynn, what I am having to meet and down now is whether or no being alive is anything at all. You know I've been a man for effort on the outside. What am I to do for the rest of my days besides fight disease? Develop my character? I'm a sweet creature to start in to calcimine my inside life with ethical enameline, ain't I? I can't live inside. You know that. What am I to *do*, honey?"

All his sense of defeat, his pride in his old life, his blank inability to get hold of another life, beat into the question and tolled up to her like a knell.

"But I have to have you, Hardin! That's

THE WAY OF THE STRONG

something. It might easily be a purpose—”

“Ah, but do you?” he cried, on a sudden impulse to get at the bare truth of everything. “You are young, sound, whole. Do you really want me,—ah, there! there! I know, I know!”—he veered swiftly because of the fright, the appeal on her face.

“You could n’t go on without me. I guess there would n’t be anything ahead for you. There would n’t be anything ahead for me without you, no matter how many arms were left me. I could n’t live without you. And you can’t live without me. That’s it, is it?”

“Yes, that’s it,” she cried chokingly. “I could n’t face the future. I should feel that somehow it was all my fault, that if I had been everything I might have been, you would not have gone. Anybody who is left must feel like that, I think. Ah, Hardin, stay with me,—want to stay!” She threw her arms about him and clung to him. Her abandon, her forgetfulness of his crippled

HENDERSON

shoulder made him wince with a pain that was, all the while, a joy. She had triumphed again; she had brought life back to him again; her presence had softened and enlivened his thought again, and, conquered, he let his head rest upon hers, while he peered out timidly upon the new life.

Henderson came back presently and found them like that, and Shore greeted him with a note of the old boyish pleasantness of temper; a forced note, but welcome, for all that, to the two who had been for so long trying to make him put out that kind of effort.

“ Well, Henderson, here goes for a fresh start.” Shore let his arm slip from his wife, and got to his feet as though he would take hold of life anew single-handed. “ You two keep at a fellow so eternally, there’s nothing to do but do as you say. Live, you say. All right, I’ll live. I’ll fight to live. I don’t want to, but I’ll do it, I’ll work for it, just for you two.” He began a nervous pacing to and fro, the strength that was in him

THE WAY OF THE STRONG

urging him into some kind of activity, however unsatisfying.

"Sit down, old man, sit down!"

"Oh, my God, Henderson, I can't sit down. I'm reconstructing myself. I need some room. Look at the power of that wind in the trees,—it's the kind of thing that's shaking me. Here, I'm going out on the porch a minute to watch that wind, to feel it. It helps. Yes, I am. You've both been. Did n't hurt you. Now I'm going."

In rousing him at all they had taken the risk of over-keying him, and, at high tension, a paroxysm of nervousness upon him, he passed out on the porch, the other two behind him, powerless to oppose the strength of his mood. "Ah, this is better, better!" he cried, sending his voice out into the sweep and roar of the storm. The wind had increased in violence and tore over the hills now with the howl of wolves. The air was shot through with electricity, and streaks of gold and blue played out of the slate-black sky.

HENDERSON

At the barn door the farm-hands clustered anxiously. "Look at that! Look at that!" cried one suddenly, and stretched out a long hairy arm, whose crooked forefinger pointed down the yard.

"The sick man! Gord, he's crazy!"

Hardin Shore, that unbearable nervousness still upon him, had gone down into the yard, rejecting warning and remonstrance, after the manner of convalescence. Coatless, bareheaded, he forged into the storm, his eyes eager with the stimulus of the air, a fine free mood triumphing over his despondency. "Oh, I'm all right now," he cried to the two who followed him, and he threw off Henderson's hold impatiently. "I'm no sick man, Henderson. Don't hold me back. I'm well again. No, I won't go in. No, I won't take care! No, I won't do one damn weak thing for at least five minutes. Whew, that wind! No Missourian ever forgets the thrash of it!" The up-welling strength within him communicated its inspiration to the two be-

THE WAY OF THE STRONG

side him, and they stopped trying to restrain him, smiling at him, letting him have his way. "This is the right sort of thing," he cried; "this is living. You want to put life into me? This does it. Give me something on the outside to stand up against."

He pushed up a high knoll, crowned by one giant-trunked, lean walnut, storm-tossed but invincible, and they came on after him. At the feet of the beetling bluff the Missouri, swollen and black, tore tumultuously through her bar-locked channels. The distant upturned fields, the timber patches, the feeble young corn were being raked and flattened by the teeth of the wind, that now swooped low and bit and crunched at the ground, now rose, screaming, and sent the very clouds driving before it. On the top of the knoll, Shore stopped triumphantly, and the other two stopped with him.

As they stood watching the gray, wild weather, — Shore jubilant, his temporary exhilaration overriding the memory of his

HENDERSON

affliction, whole again by virtue of his renewed physical joy in living, — a blue-gold gleam shot out of the sky, spiking the air with blinding needles. In the flash that followed, Henderson, benumbed, helpless, tingling, heard somewhere above them the popping and straining of tough fibres, and knew that the big walnut was falling toward them, but could move neither hand nor foot in the voltaic shock upon him. With his wide-open, staring eyes he could see, however, — see the woman standing as he stood, dazed, helpless, — see Hardin Shore's one mighty arm upheld, the corded muscles standing out like cables under the velvet sleeve, his face lit with a proud confidence ; see the tree deflected and go crashing to the ground beyond them ; see Shore's foot slip, and Shore go down under the trunk, while they two stood by, helpless, and the farmhands came running from the barn.

The wind went higher yet by night, but

THE WAY OF THE STRONG

the sun set red and glorious. In a bedroom in the foreland farmhouse a strong man lay dying, and his passing was no small thing, but glorious, like the setting of the sun.

“How much better, how much better,” he murmured to two who knelt beside him, “to lay down this maimed body for you both, — to pay you back for your fight for my life.” An illumination lay on his face; he looked as though he were breathing light. “It was a great chance,” — he turned to the woman beside him pleadingly, as though he must reconcile her to his choice, — “I would have tried to live just because you wanted it so; I had made up my mind to it; but it would have been hard to live as I must have lived, and I can’t help being glad that the matter got beyond us, — and you must try to see that this sort of dying is better — than any sort of living.” He held to her hand, the strength of his love surging toward her as the strength of his body ebbed; then his eyes closed softly for a moment. When

HENDERSON

they opened again they fell upon the man beside him.

"Henderson?"

"I am here, Hard. But, oh, God! if I were not here! If I could have died instead!"

"Ah, that shows this is a great fate, — when you envy me, old man, — but don't begrudge me my destiny," — his voice weakened and stopped, his eyes roaming out of window, where the yellow road rose out of his childhood to the top of the hill and lost itself on the other side.

In the swales the tough grass dipped and rose; on the hills the trees went like flails; overhead was the roar of an unseen surf. The sun went down trailing glory as Hardin Shore turned his illumined face toward it.

"How much better" — they heard him say again, a final Praise-God in his tone — "that a man lay down his life for his friends, — it's the way of the strong."

VI

THE BEGINNING

THE eventful hour of the day had come for the Penangton depot. The train from St. Louis for Kansas City was due. Groups of Penangtonians stood about. For every person who had come down to take the train, six had come down to see how he looked when he did it. The ticket-agent's assistant, who handled the baggage, was frightfully busy with two trunks and a valise. The bus had backed up to the platform. Four buggies and a buckboard were at the hitching-rail over by the Thorley-Penryn Serotherapy Stables. The teamsters who had got in line in front of the Penryn Coal Pockets stood up in their wagons to watch. Some coal-diggers, pot-black from the little lamps on their caps to the broken shoes on their feet, stopped on their way home from the Penryn

HENDERSON

mines and arranged themselves like a row of crows on the platform. Some gay young girls waited on the bridge between the street-car track and the depot. Little quivers of excitement shook through everybody. A negro, in a road-wagon, held the reins across a pair of pawing, impatient horses behind the depot.

Just beyond the track the ground sloped upward for a few feet and was topped by a rail fence. On the fence, side by side, sat five men, their knees up under their chins, their eyes down the track to the east. Occasionally one of the five snatched at a blade of the high grass pushing up about his feet, occasionally all five laughed at nothing. The little thin, hard-faced man was Lowry Penryn. The three well set-up, important young fellows were his sons. The high-headed man with the light in his eyes was Henderson.

"Say, I wish she would come on. Say, think of her being away for two years."

THE BEGINNING

Edgar, the youngest Penryn, took a deep breath. "Bet you won't find that sticky, empty feeling around the house to-night," he went on. "Bet you everything 'll seem all right from the ground up, minute I get sight of Lynn. D'you ever notice how my sister is the whole thing, Garth?" The youngest Penryn was at the age when the masculine judgment is sanest and coolest in its analysis of the eternal feminine, viewing it telescopically, as one views the stars, getting large abstractions from it. He was for the moment too interested in the way he was handling his subject to care for an answer. "Lynn has her looks and her brains and her — well, that way she makes you glad she's there. There ain't many women up to my sister, Garth?" He appealed to Henderson, as to a confidential friend, with direct inquiry, at last.

"It seems to me you take the right view, Edgar," assented Henderson gravely.

"Well, but two years! That's a good

HENDERSON

while to have managed without her. She won't go to Europe again, sure." It was hard-faced Lowry himself who spoke, his queer crippled feelings hobbling out jerkily on his sharp voice. Each of the five nodded with a little flare of conviction on that count.

"Hi! Hi!" cried Maxwell Penryn then; "hear that? She's a-coming."

The five jumped from the fence on the instant and hurried across the track to the platform. Henderson drew a great sighing breath and allowed the father and brothers to pass ahead of him along the cinder-path toward the Pullman car. The train slowed down, the Penryns reached the sleeper, a little boy rushed through the sleeper door and tumbled hilariously into the arms of the Penryn men. Behind the little boy came a woman. For a second Henderson could see her on the car-steps, smiling down at her father and brothers, see the strength and symmetry of her figure, see all the little

THE BEGINNING

things that made her so inexpressibly, so comprehensively the right woman, — the youthful joy of life that radiated from her, the world-old deep sweetness of her eyes, the humorous crinkle at their corners, the lithe grace of her movements, the quick searching glance across the heads of the people below her.

Then came the meeting between her eyes and his, and her wonderful, vital effect upon him.

“ Oh, I am glad that you are here ! ” she cried, her hand in his, — trembling a little in his, — a delicate emphasis in her inflection. Her gaze flew past him like a long arrow of light as she tried to talk to him, and she turned from him quickly to speak to the Penangtonians who were pushing toward her. It was the old, gay diffidence, part of the enticing remoteness that was such an exquisite part of her.

When he got a chance to speak to her again he told her that he wanted her to

HENDERSON

walk back over the hills with him, and she said that she would.

Then the Penryn men took the little boy and got in the surrey and started homeward, and Henderson and she left the depot together. They crossed the bridge slowly. They went up the plank walk slowly. The air was musky with fragrance. On the hills the fruit trees were blooming. The great domes of pink and white blossoms looked like wind temples. Overhead the birds started lullabys that drowsed away sleepily, leaving the trees shaking in the general high tremble of music.

"The old leafiness of the town is here again," he said softly.

"And the old smell of lilacs still drifts over the fences," she answered as softly.

To Henderson it was a tremendous thing to be walking beside her, filled as he was with the sense that he was seeing her for the very last time as something separate and apart from himself. He took delight in this

THE BEGINNING

suspended interval, keeping a little distance between them for the sake of a mental perspective, looking down upon her, watching the ways of the shyness that now and then made her catch at her breath, remembering the past, seeing the future.

They talked of Penangton's growth next. Three houses had tumbled down, but four new ones had been built. He stopped her to point them out with his bamboo stick. Stopping where they did reminded him of something.

"It was just here," he said reminiscently, "that I put down my grips one October night and tried to look Penangton in the eye for the first time."

"And it was just there," she answered, as they continued their slow progress, "that we met in the mule-car. And there's the saloon where the driver was drunk. And yonder go the very mules you drove."

"Ah, then, you remember?"

"You were a young doctor straying into

HENDERSON

Penangton in search of a location, and I was an old Penangtonian coming home for a visit. And we banged down to my father's house all alone in the dingy little car."

"We sang and laughed. I remember that."

"Yes. But when we came out now and then into the flicker of the street-lamps, I could see your face plainly, see the defeat on it, see the reckless slouch of your shoulders. You were almost ready to stop that night, weren't you?"

"I've been ready to stop plenty of nights since, too."

"But now success is upon you, and you are glad that you went on?"

She was looking out over the most distant hills that broke and tumbled into the Missouri. From where they stood they could see the flying light on the yellow river. The dusk had filled mysteriously with shadows.

"Ah, success is a little thing," he told her

THE BEGINNING

at last, half lifting his hand toward her. She would not look at him, and his hand dropped back quietly.

"I'm glad you did n't come East to meet me," she said, after a long silence.

"Well, it was n't easy not to. But you said not, and I had stuck it out so long that I thought I ought to stick it out to the finish. You see, I have always wanted everything to get right here, here where I first saw you." His words were brave and candid, but something of her timidity suddenly communicated itself to him and made him realize that that fine reticence of hers was going to be a hard thing to get through. Then, with the very keenness of the realization, he became impetuous and assertive.

"I told Judge Harmon to happen in at your father's this evening after supper," he said, "and I have a marriage license in my pocket."

The words burdened the air with a yet more mystic fragrance, bewildering and

HENDERSON

breath-taking. She stopped in the street for a half second; her breath shaking, her long lashes veiling her eyes. "To-morrow would n't do as well?" she began furtively.

"To-morrow would n't do at all. You must remember that you have already made me wait a long time. This is the best way."

She bit her lip, and one of her little gay laughs escaped her. They had turned into a dark, leafy street, and were now at the gate in front of the Penryn house.

"Once," he said, stopping at the gate, in the resistless grasp of the future, "once, as we stood here together, I dared to say that I hoped it was not the end, and you had to tell me that you thought it was — look at me! — well, and now?"

"Well, and now I dare tell you —" she began bravely, her soul flashing through the little break in her plastic strength, but before the leaping light in his eyes her soul took fright, and fled back to cloister.

"And now you dare tell me?" he urged,

THE BEGINNING

pushing after with all his right and might;
“now you dare tell me what?”

“— dare tell you that I think it’s the beginning,” she answered breathlessly; and, slipping by him, went through the door of the great house into the hall, where she stood waiting for him, safer from the view of passers-by, the red glow from the chandelier falling upon her, her slender, firm body swaying a little toward him, her hands held out to him. For another short instant he could not go to her, could only stand voiceless, looking at her, enmeshed in the chance of going to her; she was so perfectly what he had waited for, with the glow upon her, the love-light in her eyes.

Then he ran up the steps and closed the door softly behind him.

The Riverside Press

*Electrotyped and printed by H. O. Houghton & Co.
Cambridge, Mass., U. S. A.*

